

Itachi's true story: Book of Bright Light

Chapter 1 – The bird in the dark night hasn't left the nest yet

1

Uchiha Itachi remembered clearly the moment in which he became aware of the kind of person he was.

It was raining that day.

The rain, so intense that he practically couldn't open his eyes, was hitting mercilessly Itachi's little body, who had just turned four.

His father, who was standing beside him, wouldn't even try to spend some words to console him.

Itachi didn't even expect such thing.

«Keep it in mind, this is a battlefield.»

Pushing their way through the sound of the rainfall that rumbled thunderously, his father's strong words drove into Itachi's heart.

Battlefield...

It wasn't the kind of word that a four-year-old boy would keep in his memory.

Much less, the view now spreading in front of Itachi's eyes wasn't the kind of thing suitable for a child to see.

Corpses, corpses, corpses...

There were mountains of corpses as far as he could see.

There weren't calm expressions. All the corpses had stiffened with an expression still distorted by pain.

«You'll become a shinobi in few years, too. Even if this war ends, it doesn't mean that the shinobi's reality changes. The world in which you'll walk in is a world like this.»

While hearing his heartless father's voice, Itachi endured patiently.

If he had lost his focus, tears would have brimmed over.

It's not that he was afraid.

It's not that he was sad, too.

His feelings, which couldn't be expressed with mere words, were swirling, and he couldn't understand why but his chest couldn't help but tighten.

He was soaking wet for the rain.

Even if he cried, his father probably wouldn't notice.

Even so, he didn't want to cry. He thought that if he cried here, he would have lost something important for his life as a shinobi.

That's why he endured frantically.

And yet...

Tears began overflowing spontaneously.

There were people wearing Konoha's forehead protectors.

There were people who looked like shinobi from other countries.

Things like country limits had nothing to do with the innumerable corpses that covered the surface of that land. While everyone suffered, was felt sad and struggled, they couldn't fight against their own death. Their expressions full of anguish were the same, no matter which country those shinobi were from.

There was no one who died wanting to die.

And yet all of them died.

Why?

It was the law of war.

«Dad»

Itachi heard his own voice. Then, for the first time, he realised he was shivering.

It wasn't because the rain was cold.

It wasn't that he was afraid of the corpses, either.

It was the anger that made Itachi shiver.

«Why, in such place...»

His father, after staying silent for a moment at his very young child's question, began answering, selecting his words.

«You're a smart child.»

As he shifted his attention on his rage, Itachi waited for his father's words.

Something warm touched his head.

His father's palm.

«That's why I wanted to show you this reality.»

Itachi frantically looked inside his heart for the meaning of this word, reality. He was still four. He didn't know that reality was different from fiction and things like that.

And yet the meaning of the things his father was trying to say was clear to him.

«This is the world in which I'm living...»

«That's right Itachi. A shinobi is a living thing that fights. Never forget the scene you saw today.»

Prompted by his father's voice, Itachi stared. He burned the picture of hell that spread in front of his eyes inside his pupils in order to never forget it.

He felt a dull pain inside his eyeballs.

That lukewarm feeling, different from tears, crawled inside his eyeballs. Unable to stand that sensation, similar to a wave of violent power flowing into his pupils, he instinctively closed his eyelids with fear. Thereupon, slowly and quietly the powerful wave faded at the centre of his head.

His heart was pounding violently, his breath was wild. He took a big breath, and opened his eyes. That world that looked like hell was spreading in front of his eyes as before.

He gently placed a hand on his chest.

It seemed to him that if he had surrendered himself to a power like that, he would have lost himself.

«What's wrong?»

Without answering to his father's question, he just stared motionlessly at the scene in front of his eyes.

Even if this hell was the world he lived in, he had no intention of just standing and watching it.

I'll change it...

No matter what, trying to solve everything with conflicts was a mistake. If the world was like this, he had to change it.

That was the foundation of the man called Uchiha Itachi.

Itachi never forgot the scene of that day for the rest of his life.

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The Great War that had involved shinobi of whole continents ended after several weeks from the day Itachi had become aware of the meaning of his own existence. This war, which later on would be called Third Shinobi World War, came to an end thanks to the conclusion of an armistice treaty between the Village Hidden in the Leaves and the Village Hidden in the Stones, which were the main warring states.

Konoha was taking the lead in the situation of the war, but according to the appeasement policy due to Hiruzen, who was the Third Hokage, a cessation of hostilities had been achieved by means of the exceptional condition of not demanding at all compensations from Iwagakure. The people of the pro-war faction opposed against Hiruzen's decision, who had been seen as weak. To keep the discontent of the village down, Hiruzen decided to resign as the Third Hokage. As a result, a new Hokage had to be elected, and Namikaze Minato, who had been labelled as Hero of the Great War, took the position of Fourth.

Because of Hiruzen's resignation, little by little the village was about to recover from the disorders of the Great War.

Itachi had a precise goal.

«By becoming a shinobi better than anybody else, I'll get rid of all the conflicts from this world.»

For an adult, it would have seemed an exaggerated dream that could be laughed at. But for a four-year-old Itachi, this dream was the most valuable thing that exceeded all the rest.

He would be accepted as an official ninja after studying the basic ninjutsu at the Academy and taking the exam for the first time he had been admitted.

But Itachi, who was still four, hadn't enough requirements to attend to the Academy.

He wanted to become a shinobi as soon as possible.

That's why he trained by himself.

«I'm home.»

Itachi quietly took off his shoes in the entryway, and slowly walked through the hallway.

«Welcome home»

When he passed in front of the kitchen, his mother Mikoto greeted him. Now, a new life was dwelling inside his mother's womb.

A younger brother or a younger sister...

Either way, it was Itachi's first sibling.

«Did you train by yourself today as well?»

«Yeah»

At her son's answer, who looked like a grown-up rather than a four-year-old boy,

Mikoto, who had turned around holding her heavy belly, shrugged.

«Is dad in his room?»

«He is, but now he's a little...»

While listening to his mother's words, Itachi walked towards his father's room. In today's training he had had problem on how to grip a kunai, so he wanted to ask him right away.

«Why the Fourth is that Minato!»

An enraged voice, which could be heard from the other side of the door, stopped Itachi's feet.

«You never know who's listening, lower your voice Yashiro»

That calm voice was his father's.

«However, I don't get it. When they were selected for the Fourth elections, wasn't Orochimaru-sama the only name listed besides Minato? Why no one nominated Fugaku-sama's name?» the voice of the man called Yashiro replied to his father. Itachi recalled inside his head the face of the man called Yashiro. A man with narrow eyes and short grey hair. While older than his father, that man worked as his subordinate.

«Yashiro-san is right. I don't get it, too.»

«Inabi» his father called by his name the owner of the new voice. Uchiha Inabi was one of the best shinobi of the Konoha Military Police Force. He had characteristic long black hair. He was one of his father's subordinate, too.

«When you spoke about "Fugaku of the evil eyes" during the Great War, the shinobi of the other countries trembled with fear.»

«Commanding officer of the Konoha Military Police Force. My name is that for the village.»

«I'm telling you that that's a strategy of the higher-ups.»

Yashiro raised his voice again, and went on talking.

«The higher-ups, who don't want the Uchiha clan to rise to the front stage, didn't want to announce officially Fugaku-sama's prominent role during the Great War to the village. For this reason, people like Minato and the Sannin, even Hatake Kakashi, who has the Sharingan despite he doesn't belong to the clan, stood up in the end. If it's true that Minato and Kakashi are so lionised, Fugaku-sama's name is identically...»

«Enough, quit it»

At Fugaku's command, Yashiro faltered.

«My son is listening»

Itachi's body had a little start on his spot.

«What is it, Itachi?»

He had been sensed...

He was inexperienced.

Itachi gritted his teeth.

Reluctantly, he slowly opened the door.

Inside, there were four people.

His father Fugaku, and Yashiro with Inabi. And another person, a man who had a small dot on his forehead. That man was a subordinate of his father's as well, his name was Uchiha Tekka.

«What do you want?»

«There's a thing I want to ask you about the shuriken jutsu.»

«I'm busy right now, do it later.»

«Understood.»

As he spoke, he promptly closed the door.

The second he closed it, a deep red light filled the eyes of the four men.

The Sharingan.

The kekkei genkai inherited among the Uchiha clan.

While going back to his own room, Itachi remembered the atmosphere that filled his father's room. Thereupon, for some reason the battlefield he saw with his father was brought back to his memory.

The picture of hell that was full to the brim with malice and ill will...

The presence, with which everyone in his father's room was clad, was identical to the ominous atmosphere he felt at the battlefield.

«What is dad thinking...»

There was no one to answer his muttering voice.

2

Five years old.

Things like his own birthday were indifferent for Itachi. A turning point that happens every year is hardly a turning point. Whether it was a year passed loosely, or a year he lived densely, a year was a year. Just because he turned one year older, it didn't mean that something had changed.

The important thing was training every day.

To keep improving steadily step by step was important.

Itachi was like that, but with the big change that happened to him this year, he was bound to change his mind.

The cause of it is now in front of his eyes.

«Well?»

Without answering to Mikoto's voice, who was talking while lying on the bed, he looked at the body that was lying down in front of his knees as he was kneeling down.

It seemed that the little newborn child, while he made his eyes that couldn't see yet wander about the empty space, tried with all his might to understand the situation around him.

At a sudden prompt, the baby shook with a start. Frightened by this reaction, he drew his hand back, and his mother stared at Itachi chuckling.

«Sasuke»

The name of this child.

His brother.

Uchiha Sasuke...

Itachi gently stroke the blushing cheeks again.

«Sasuke...»

The moment he called his brother's name for the first time, something warm suddenly burned inside his heart. Unlike the love he felt for his father and his mother, it was an indescribable, special affection. Itachi, being five-year-old, couldn't express well what kind of emotion he was really feeling. But in front of this ephemeral human being, while it looked like he could break if he only touched him, he was sure that a sense of responsibility as a man that he had to protect him had bud.

«Please, take care of your little brother»

At his mother's words, Itachi nodded firmly as he stroke Sasuke's cheeks.

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Since when he had been taken along to the battlefield by his father, he had kept training without resting even for a day.

One year until the long awaited Academy entrance. He had polished his skills a little, and becoming an excellent shinobi was Itachi's only goal.

Why becoming an excellent shinobi?

To get rid of all the conflicts from this world of course.

His father's words, that the shinobi lived mostly to kill each other, couldn't be accepted by Itachi at all.

Did ninjutsu and chakra really existed only for conflicts?

Itachi could swear it was not like it.

If there was superior power, approaching the people who kept fighting and stop them should be possible. If there were a shinobi who excelled all the other people who were fighting, if there weren't opponents who could oppose against such shinobi, everybody would obediently listen to him, and should follow him.

Itachi wanted to become a shinobi like that.

He believed that if he were stronger than anybody else, and more capable than anybody else, he'd probably be able to stop the huge conflicts like the previous Great War.

It was his goal. That's why his diligence wasn't a pain for him.

The small wood that was immediately near his house was Itachi's training ground.

The wooden targets were hanged all over the forest of cedars. They were the size of a human head, and two black circles were painted on them.

Itachi was standing alone in the deserted wood. A kunai was caught in between each finger. Itachi's weapons were eight kunai in total.

«Fuu...»

He closed his eyes, and slowly exhaled from the bottom of his stomach.

As he crouched he kicked the ground with all his strength.

His body, which was revolving in midair, turned upside down.

He quickly extended both his arms, which he had kept in position bracing his chest, to left and right.

Eight flashes scattered in eight directions.

Clack clack clack, a light sound echoed around Itachi, who had landed.

The sharp blades had pierced the middle of every target that was hanged in the cedar wood.

«Splendid»

At the voice that he suddenly heard from behind, Itachi turned around, gulping.

A black haired boy was standing there.

He was clearly older than Itachi. As an evidence, a Konoha forehead protector was glittering silver on the boy's forehead.

«How old are you?» the boy asked him.

Itachi didn't know his name, but he knew him by sight.

Just like him, he was a shinobi from the Uchiha clan.

«Five»

«At that age, to show such kunai-handling to that extent, you're a great guy»

While saying this, the boy held out his hand to him.

«I'm Uchiha Shisui»

«I'm...»

«I know you. Itachi of the Konoha Military Police Force commanding officer Fugakusan.»

At Shisui, who had addressed him with a friendly attitude, Itachi was perplexed. Probably this feeling appeared on his face, because Shisui opened his eyes wide, shrugging.

«I had heard that you were a strange child that doesn't want to chat very much with people, but apparently you're really obstinate.»

«If there's no use doing it...»

«Ah, don't say that»

Laughing, Shisui disappeared.

Itachi's eyes followed his presence.

The sky.

Revolving in midair just like Itachi did some time ago, Shisui extended both his arms wide to left and right.

Eight flashes dashed.

«!»

Itachi opened his eyes wide.

«How was it?»

Shisui, who had landed, grinned.

«My kunai-handling is pretty nice, too, isn't it?»

Right near Itachi's kunai that were stuck before, there were stuck new kunai. Naturally, Shisui had thrown them.

«I've seen from quite some time that you came here to train every day.»

Shisui, who had slowly got closer, offered his hand to him again.

«Make friends with me»

He had a comfortable tone of voice that won him over very naturally. Itachi held out his hand as if he had been invited.

Warmth enveloped his palm.

«Nice to meet you, Itachi»

While he looked at Shisui, who had a smile covering his whole face, he was bewildered by the fact that he had accepted this strangely over-familiar shinobi.

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They were looking at the moon.

He and Sasuke alone...

His father and his mother had gone out.

He had left the door open, and sat on the porch holding Sasuke.

The moonlight was almost dazzling.

The full moon, which was shining brilliantly erasing the rays of the stars surrounding it, looked like it was going to spill out and drop from the sky at any time.

A gentle breeze was softly caressing Itachi's cheeks.

«Hn?»

He raised his eyebrows at the faint bad smell that was blended in the wind. As if he had sensed his older brother's change, or his baby keen sensitivity had perceived that variation, in his arms Sasuke became fretful.

He stared at the moon in the sky.

«What? This feeling...»

Sasuke began weeping loudly.

«There, there»

While he comforted his brother rocking him, his eyes were fixed on the moon.

The beast-smelling wind blew again.

«This unpleasant feeling. And at a time like this that dad and mum have gone out...»

Sasuke was crying more violently than ever. Since it wasn't the right time to keep looking at the moon, with a smile on his face Itachi lowered his eyes on his cute little brother.

«Don't cry Sasuke, because your older brother will absolutely protect you, no matter what»

Sasuke's weeping voice, who heard Itachi's voice and was crying in fear until that moment, turned from cries to a fuss. It was a subtle difference that didn't change that much in force. Surely he understood it because they were siblings, it was a change in Sasuke's mental state.

Something is approaching...

Itachi had no choice but to put more strength on his arms that were holding Sasuke.

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In this sudden situation the village was in a complete chaos.

Uchiha Fugaku stared with a stern expression at the cloud of dust that was rising in the distance.

He was on the rooftop of the Konoha Military Police Force. His close aides, who consisted in the elite of the Uchiha clan, were waiting for orders around him.

«T-that is...» the grey-haired Yashiro muttered, waiting on his left. Also Fugaku had already spotted the cause of it.

«Eek, the Nine-Tails...»

The one who muttered this was Inabi, who was standing at his right. While brushing up his long black hair, Inabi was desperately trying to calm down his body, which was trembling in terror. Giving a sidelong glance to his subordinates, who were exposing themselves to panic, Fugaku saw through the reality in front of his eyes with resolution.

«No doubt, it's the Nine-Tails.»

From the cloud of dust that was rising from the heart of the village nine tails were crawling out, writhing like big snakes. At the end where the tails united, there was the shape of an orange-coloured beast. Howling at the full moon suspended on the sky, there was the ominous fox.

The legendary beast that brought disaster to this world.

«I'll dispatch the unit on the place immediately. I'll go, too.»

«Fugaku-sama, you'll go in person?» Yashiro asked, who was scared stiff.

«Of course!»

Although he shouted at him, his eyes were still turned towards the Nine-Tails.

Angry roars and screams could be heard from the place they got to. Probably that shape could be seen from any point of the village. Even in the places that right now hadn't sustained any damages, if someone witnessed the Nine-Tails shape the chaos couldn't be avoided.

«Maybe this will become the biggest catastrophe since the foundation of the village. At a time like this can I, the captain of the Military Police, look without doing anything?»

«But...»

Getting near the Nine-Tails meant that your life would be exposed to danger. Among the shinobi that went to the actual spot first, probably there were already victims. Naturally Yashiro was afraid.

«I've never done my job so far holding on for dear life»

«Captain...»

Tears flowed from Yashiro's narrow eyes.

«Only the Sharingan, which the Uchiha clan possesses, can to control the Nine-Tails. I will be impossible to stop it unless we run to it.»

«Captain!»

His close aide Tekka appeared, running upstairs.

From the ghastly state of his skilled subordinate, Fugaku guessed the situation was alarming.

«What's the matter»

«There are instructions from the higher-ups now, we Military Police Force will be guarding the village»

«What!»

Fugaku stared at Tekka as if he doubted his own ears. His subordinates, who had quickly sensed their boss's anger, voiced each their own conjectures.

«The Sharingan is the only thing that can control the Nine-Tails. Perhaps the higher-ups fear it...»

«They'll say this uproar is our fault!» Yashiro yelled.

He could understand their feeling so much it hurt.

The Uchiha clan was part of the Village of the Hidden Leaf. There's no way that they'd cause mayhem setting free a beast like the Nine-Tails. If the people who could control the Nine-Tails tried to make it avoid the very place where they lived, they would have been suspected immediately. People who behaved so foolishly weren't absolutely within his clan. Currently, the beast that was going on a rampage in front of his eyes was devastating the village indiscriminately. That was the same as if they had called this catastrophe against themselves.

At least, it wasn't an action of the Uchiha clan **that was living in the Village of the Hidden Leaf right now...**

«Transmit that we've understood.» he told Tekka as if he had spat out something bitter.

«Captain!»

When he nodded wordlessly at Yashiro, who had drawn closer, Fugaku walked towards the stairs that led to the lower floor.

He was worried about Itachi and Sasuke that he had left at home, but now his priority was carrying out the mission he had been assigned to.

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«Itachi!»

«Mum»

Mikoto hugged Itachi tightly, who was standing on the alleyway in front of his house holding Sasuke.

«I'm glad you're safe...»

«I thought that I hadn't to make you worry, mum, if you came back home after the two of us ran away, so I waited.»

«Yeah, yeah...» Mikoto nodded while tears streamed down.

His eyes, which had tensed for the nervousness of having to protect his younger brother, somehow softened. But for a brief moment, when he noticed that something was approaching from his mother's back, immediately he recovered the sternness from before.

«Mum»

He handed Sasuke over to his mother as if to abandon.

He jumped.

A rock, which the Nine-tails that could be seen from far away had thrown, had smashed near the house, and part of it was sent flying through the air. One of it was falling towards his mother's back.

He looked below to his mother holding Sasuke. She was following with her eyes in wonder what was happening, that is Itachi jumping suddenly.

A rock that huge could easily crush the three of them, mother and children.

«I'll protect you...» he muttered.

He clutched his fist tightly.

Shinobi's taijutsu weren't physical strength. Even if he was a five-year-old child whose body couldn't do it, if he was able to use his chakra for sure he'd be able to smash even a huge rock.

He pushed his fist high.

Chakra pervaded his arm, and clad it in a pale blue blaze.

The rock, which crashed against Itachi's fist, smashed making a high-pitched sound.

Even if he was a child, as long as he continued his shinobi training he would have no difficulty in things like breaking rocks.

While a rain of pebbles showered him, he landed without a sound.

«Are you okay?» he called out to the two, turning around. His mother was looking at Itachi opening her eyelids with all her might, unable to hide her amazement. His mother was a jōnin. That's why she was admiring Itachi's agility of that moment so much.

«It's dangerous here. Come now, let's go to the place where everyone is gathered.»

«Right...»

Itachi rushed over his mother, who got up as if she had been pushed by his voice, and took her hand.

«To be already able to do such thing despite not being entered the Academy yet... you're absolutely your father's son»

Probably he was being praised, but now it was the last of his worries. His head was full with the sense of duty of having to carry his brother and mother to a safe place somehow or another.

He could hear screams of women and children and angry roars of men coming from around him. Together with the roaring sound that the rubble was making, it was a dreadful scene.

People were running about trying to escape while spilling blood.

A man was shouting at a fellow shinobi even if he had lost an arm.

A young woman was looking dumbfounded at a pile of rubbles that had crumbled down, just like a puppet whose thread had been severed.

Some children kept weeping out loud while trying to shake their mother awake, who had become cold.

Near the centre of his head, Itachi heard a strident sound that hurt his ears.

Although it wasn't that he had been running for a distance that could wear him out, he began chocking.

The scene in front of his eyes started overlapping with the battlefield he saw when he was four.

War...

A dull pain ran through his eyes. Just like that time, a wave of power pulsed from the back of his eyeballs.

That moment, he felt like his field of vision had been dyed crimson, but it ended immediately.

«Itachi?»

His mother, who had noticed a change in her son, called him from behind.

«I'm okay, mum»

He ran for his life.

He ran to escape from that mighty violence called Nine-Tails.

“I want the strength to end all the conflicts” he thought from the bottom of his heart.

He wanted to become a strong shinobi.

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There were the shadows of four people in the council room that was in the Hokage residence.

The Third Hokage, Sarutobi Hiruzen.

Shimura Danzō of the Anbu.

And Homura and Koharu of the Honourable Council.

The sudden emergency had ended, and Hiruzen, whose face wrinkles had become somehow deep in his tiredness, opened his mouth while gazing at his three comrades.

«The Fourth and his wife Kushina sealed the Nine-Tails at the cost of their lives. As a result, the village has been protected somehow.»

Listening to him with a sour look, Danzō continued.

«However also during the Great War the village sustained catastrophic damages that it had never experienced before.»

«If we don't do repair work urgently, the other villages might attack us with this opportunity.»

The one who said this was the advisor Homura.

Hiruzen, who had nodded briefly, joined the conversation with a serious tone.

«About that matter, I'm thinking of arrange them immediately.»

«In that regard, there's a matter that I want you to fulfil at any cost.»

Danzō's exposed left eye, who concealed the right half of his face with bandages, emitted a ruthless radiance. Hiruzen took that ice-like stare wordlessly, and gave him an inquiring look. Danzō, who sensed it, continued.

«I want you to relegate the Uchiha clan's residences to the outer edge of the village.»

«What did you say?»

Hiruzen glowered at him wrinkling his brows.

However, Danzō continued indifferently without a flinch.

«You sure know that the Sharingan that the Uchiha clan has got is the only thing capable of controlling the Nine-Tails.»

«Do you mean that was a person from the Uchiha the one who summoned the Nine-Tails?»

«Exactly.»

At Danzō's assertion, Hiruzen gasped. The two advisors watched attentively their vehement dialogue as they kept silent.

«The treatment of the Uchiha during the Great War, and the cold treatment for Fugaku at the time of the decision of the Fourth. In recent years, the Uchiha's dissatisfaction towards the village has risen.»

«I don't think so.»

«The men of the Root have been checking diligently the Uchiha's movements. It's a fact that the Uchiha are dissatisfied.»

«It has ancient origins...»

«It's not just that.»

Hiruzen was pressed by Danzō's confidence.

«The despair for the fact that even the rare genius called Evil Eyes Fugaku had to content himself with being captain of the Military Police Force had bud in the people who had experienced the Great War. Their disappointment towards the village one day will become a great discontent and they'll attack Konoha.»

«Nevertheless, deciding that the Nine-Tail's matter is the Uchiha's fault isn't a decision a little too much impatient?»

«Just because there are no proof it doesn't mean that this kind of discussion is enough to leave the thing as they are, Hiruzen. Or is it? The Sharingan only can control the Nine-Tails. That's the truth.»

Hiruzen faltered.

«At any rate, we'll chase away the Uchiha clan at the margin of the village, relegating them in the same place. We should do it at once now that there's just cause of readjusting the town because of the Nine-Tails attack.»

At that man's ghastly attitude, who embodied the dark side, the three people had no choice but remain silent.

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Itachi was satisfied with his new house.

It was quite far off the centre of the village, but the Naka Shrine of his clan's origin was in that area, and above all the nature far from the margins of the village was much more. He wasn't worried about the place where he trained either, because he could cross through the border of the village if he could walk a little bit further, and on the other side hardly accessible hills and fields spread out.

He also thought that it was a nice quiet place for raising his baby brother.

But...

Apparently the adults were different.

After it had been decided to build this new district gathering the clan from here and there the village, some young shinobi had come at his father's place quite a lot.

Discrimination.

Persecution.

False accusations.

Nothing but pessimistic words could be heard coming from his father's room.

Itachi knew exactly that even the fact that the adults didn't think this migration was pleasant was a pretext.

They were under the suspicion that the perpetrator of the Nine-Tails attack was someone of the clan, and as a result of this they had been relegated at the margins of the village.

Without even allowing a short explanation...

Also Itachi thought that it was understandable that his father and the others were angry. And yet what had been decided once couldn't be helped. The clan had been gathered with great troubles, so probably it was a wise thinking to make the better out of the environment of this district.

The village, which had been crashed by the Nine-Tails, was all tattered.

Anyone, not only the Uchiha clan, was having a hard time.

There was a great number of people who took precedence over important people. There were people who were at a loss because they had lost their house. Weren't the Uchiha clan, who had been supplied with a district faster than the other people who had lost their houses for the calamity, able to think that they had been lucky?

Itachi couldn't help but be disappointed with the adults that were only dissatisfied.

«Well then, I'm off.» his father's voice said from behind Itachi, who was sitting on a chair.

The three of them (he, Sasuke and his mother) were having supper. Of course, his younger brother wasn't able to eat things steadily yet. He was sitting on his baby chair, making his head, which had just learned to hold up, swing from side to side. He turned his big and round eyes towards his older brother, and stared at Itachi bringing the rice from his bowl to his mouth in wonder.

This person was putting a white thing in his mouth with long sticks, but what in the world was he doing?

While he was tempted to wonder if he had to consider such thing an adult thing or not, there was power in his brother's eyes. Even though he was less than one year old, those strong eyes made him feel distinctly his thoughts and intents.

«What about supper?» his mother asked while looking Itachi's back. When he looked over his shoulder as if he had been asked for it, his father's stern face peeked from the space between the paper doors, which were slightly opened.

«I'll finish it outside. I'll be back home late, so I don't mind if you go to bed before me»

«Understood. See you later.»

«Bye» he said towards his mother, and his father's cold gaze, which completely unlike his older brother didn't let people see though his intentions, hit Itachi.

«There's the Academy next year. You'd better train hard.»

«Understood.»

«Auaa aa...»

As if he was mimicking Itachi, Sasuke raised his still inarticulate voice. His father nodded once looking towards his older brother, and disappeared behind the opposite side of the door.

The three of them resumed their meal.

*

«What the heck are the adults doing until late at night...» Itachi threw his naïve doubts at his friend.

Shisui, who was his only friend, stared at the Hokage Rock in the distance while smiling softly for the gossip.

The two of them were sitting on a cliff in the outskirts of the village.

Only the two of them knew that place.

There was a river under that precipitous cliff. The river streamed outside the village from behind the Hokage Rock, meandering. When it arrived nearby the place where Itachi and Shisui were sitting, both its water current and its depth were quite something.

«I'm a genin.» Shisui told him still with a distant look.

When he turned his face towards Itachi, who was listening to him silently, Shisui continued with a calm tone.

«That's why I'm going to appear in the adults' meetings.»

«Eh?»

«They are regularly held at the Naka Shrine.»

He wanted to ask him what in the world did they talk about, but feeling startled he didn't utter a word.

At Itachi's silence, Shisui cast his eyes down.

«It's better if you don't know it yet.»

Itachi stared at Shisui, who said that averting his eyes, still with a feeling of uneasiness.

That oppressing atmosphere that ran in the clan...

"Make it be just a guess" Itachi muttered many times over in his mind.

3

Six years old.

Finally Itachi had entered the Academy.

It wasn't that he was particularly happy that he could enter the school. His specific true feeling was that in that place, the school, he would get closer to being a shinobi. That situation was different than how he had trained until then, alone or with Shisui.

Those days at school were the road for being a shinobi.

That made Itachi incredibly happy.

«Well then, for a self-introduction, let me hear everyone's dreams.» the teacher, an old man, said, and took an extensive view of the students.

His first lesson.

The students, who were a little bit nervous, stared at each other's faces, perplexed.

Itachi, alone, watched his classmates that he didn't know well yet saying things like

"Hey, hey, what about you?" and talking with their friends. Then he thought something like "It's natural they are perplexed", as if the matter didn't concern him.

There was no way that one could easily say his dream in front of strangers, as they had been told to do.

«Well, in order of attendance number please.»

Whether he understood or not the students' feelings, the teacher said it out loud over the whispers that could be heard from here and there.

Uchiha Itachi...

His first initial was "U".

His attendance number was the first one.

He wasn't perplexed about what he should tell.

From as far as he could remember, his dream hadn't changed.

Should he say it frankly?

«Okay, well done.»

A classmate with a number before him got an applause. His dream was "I want to become a fine shinobi just like my father."

To become a fine shinobi like his father...

Itachi pictured Fugaku in his mind.

His father was fine.

But...

Itachi felt that being commanding officer of the Military Police Force was still not enough for his dream. It wasn't that he repudiated his father. He wondered if he had grown accustomed to excellence like his father. But, the place that Itachi thought he wanted to achieve was further away, and he couldn't tell if his father right now would ever reach that place.

«Well then, the next one, Uchiha Itachi-kun»

His teacher smiled looking at Itachi's face.

For a little while the teacher had called the names of the people that had self-introduced themselves. While he considered if what the teacher told them before wasn't meaningless, Itachi stood up from his seat and went in front of the platform.

The classmates of his same age looked at Itachi. Their interested eyes converged on him, and his forehead started itching a little.

After brushing gently a spot a little bit above his eyebrows once with his finger, he stretched his chest.

«I'm Uchiha Itachi. My dream...»

He hesitated.

The teacher and the students tilted their neck as if to say "What's wrong?"

It's not that he hadn't a dream. And it wasn't that he hadn't chosen a dream to tell for sure, either. And naturally it wasn't because his mouth couldn't work properly for the nervousness or something.

He wondered if he was really supposed to say his dream in this place.

So far the dreams that everyone had said and let people hear were nothing but modest. "I want to become like my father". "I'll become a fine shinobi and complete many missions". "I want to become a cute shinobi"...

The dreams the teacher and his classmates wished for were like that.

Itachi's dream was different.

«My dream...»

«It's okay, try to tell us.»

The teacher pushed his back.

It didn't matter what the others would think.

«I want to become a shinobi that surpasses everyone else, so that all I'll be able to make all the conflicts of this world disappear.»

He could hear someone laughing from the recess of the classroom. And then, immediately after that, an automatic applause rose.

«Well done.» the teacher said, and patted Itachi's head.

Apparently it was too much absurd, and no one had believed him. Everyone had thought that his dream wouldn't come true. A dream that looked like a wild idea that he confessed because he was an immature child that didn't know the world. Everyone had thought that for sure so he had also been laughed at, and then a cold applause had risen.

Only one, only Itachi was serious.

And immediately after that the teacher and his classmates would get to know his seriousness.

*

«Oo...»

His classmates, who were sat in a row, had lost their voices. The teacher, who was looking at him while taking notes in a place a little far off, even forgot to urge the next of the remaining students.

The lesson consisted in how little time they could hit with the kunai all the twenty human shapes that had been placed in various places of the schoolyard.

The measurement was done one person at a time.

His classmates had run around the schoolyard with all their strength, and they had got through it in more than five minutes while remaining breathless.

The places of the human shapes were known to them, but whether they were above the tallest tree in the school, or on the opposite side of a half open window of the third floor of the school building, they were in troublesome places. That's why everyone was running around frantically.

An average of five minutes.

Itachi finished it in thirty seconds.

Moreover, the kunai hit the head or the chest of all the human shapes. The only difference of the parts of the body depended on where the location was exposed, and he had hit every one of them with accurate precision.

Knowing the locations of the human shapes, and how far they were from the schoolyard...

And not only that, several people before Itachi had completed their measurement, too.

His calculations were flawless.

From the middle of the schoolyard, the starting point, Itachi had drawn a line of length and width in his brain with himself as the centre, divided the range into four equal parts, and by distinguishing roughly the location where more human shapes were crowded, he had been able to get through with them just by throwing the kunai from the starting point, halving the movements needed.

There were eight human shapes at which he could throw from the starting point.

Twelve human shapes needed him to move.

Then, this time he sorted the human shapes that needed him to move, and calculated the trajectory that could surround them efficiently.

At the teacher's starting signal, he simultaneously threw towards the eight human shapes the kunai he held on both his hands.

It didn't even take him two seconds.

Starting running from there, he promptly ran around the schoolyard to trace the route he had drawn in his mind.

Thirty seconds.

Itachi thought he had been almost slow.

In Shisui's case, he was much faster.

«G-good job. Well, next.» the teacher said with sweat beading his forehead.

Without answering to that, Itachi went back to his murmuring classmates.

Since his movements were too much amazing, no one greeted him. Surrounding Itachi from a distance, they murmured to each other, whispering.

Without caring for such reaction of those around him, Itachi thought over the result of the measure that he had just finished. In front of his eyes, the next student was desperately bustling about the schoolyard.

He could reduce it of five seconds more...

Itachi found a point of correction of the trajectory he had travelled in, and felt ashamed of his own inexperience.

«Uchiha Itachi-kun»

When the teacher called him Itachi got up and went towards the platform.

«Yes, good job also this time.»

On the paper that had been handed to him, the character of one hundred and a big flower circle were written on it.

«In this test, you were the only one who got one hundred.»

His classmate, hearing the words of the teacher, raised their voices in surprise.

Itachi bowed his head a little to the teacher, and he went straight back to his desk.

It was the third month since he had entered the school. As usual the conversation with his classmates was nothing special. Since Itachi got grades that stood out too much in every lesson, his classmates had become spontaneously diffident. Someone had greeted him once shyly, but when they heard Itachi's concise and clear replies, they didn't think of speaking to him since that.

It's not that he went to school to make friends, so this kind of things were indifferent to him.

But no matter how excellent grades he got, that feeling that they didn't satisfy him was a greater dissatisfaction for Itachi.

There was a maximum of one hundred points in the school grades. It was impossible a valuation above that. That seemed unproductive.

Would he really understand things like the nature of shinobi in such place?

School grades weren't equal to the true strength of a shinobi. He had such feeling. That's why he was always unsatisfied. If he was the number one in this school, the truth that his dream wasn't directly connected to it made Itachi hesitate.

«Take care to show this test to your parents.»

While listening to his teacher's words, Itachi carefully folded in two the paper that had the maximum score written on it.

*

«Err...»

At the unexpected voice that had called him, he slowly turned around.

He was in the corridor after school.

He was surrounded by figures of young boys that had met to play after school and young girls that talked while they laughed giggling and raised their high-pitched voices.

Everyone was extremely animated for the feeling of liberation of being set free from the crowded school.

«You're Uchiha Itachi-kun, right?»

The girl who said it looked at Itachi with an upward glance.

She had shoulder-length black hair, and kept both her hands crossed in front of her chest.

Even if her long slit eyes below her narrow eyebrows were cheerful, she had a strange charm that somehow made him feel her kindness.

«That's right.»

«I-I'm from the Uchiha clan, too»

«Really?» he replied with a blunt tone. It's not that he had something against that girl. Itachi had always this attitude at school. People in general were demoralised by a conversation of that kind. And then they didn't go through that experience again.

«My name is Uchiha Izumi. I'm in the class next to yours.»

«And?»

Today Shisui had a day-off after a long time, and they had decided to train together once school had ended. There wasn't time to dawdle around in a place like this.

«Our way back home is the same»

«The Uchiha district is just one. Of course it is.»

«W-well...»

Saying this, the girl called Izumi hung her head in shame.

«T-together...»

«Sorry, I'm in a hurry.»

As Izumi spoke, Itachi ran off through the corridor, turning his back on her.

*

«How was school?» Shisui said while wiping the sweat off his forehead with a towel.

Itachi was moving his shoulders up and down violently, and breathing heavily.

There was a park in the middle of the district.

They two had already run for about four hours. But it wasn't just running. It was full speed. They improved their speed endurance while running. People who hadn't had any shinobi training wouldn't last even five minutes.

While he kept an eye on Shisui, who's face was more composed than his, Itachi opened his mouth.

«Training with you, Shisui, is way more profitable.»

«Since you entered the Academy, you've become pretty good at talking»

«I haven't changed»

«Surely you're always pretty impertinent for a kid.» Shisui said, laughing, and put a hand on Itachi's head.

«Your classmates can't match you, right?»

«...»

Itachi didn't answer.

«Can they?» Shisui asked surprised.

As his head was being held down Itachi shook his head from side to side.

«I don't know what kind of grades my classmates get. Since I saw their movements in the schoolyard, there hadn't been anyone who I considered amazing...»

«So you can see nothing but yourself?»

He thought that maybe it was as Shisui was saying.

Itachi couldn't see as far as his classmates.

How should he be?

What should he do to become a shinobi better than anybody else?

He had been thinking about that ever since he was a child.

He couldn't afford to think about the others.

«There's no one at school more amazing than you. I'm sure of it.»

Shisui ruffled Itachi's head.

«Stop that»

He brushed his hand away.

«If you're in it, the Uchiha's future is safe.»

As he said it, laughing, Shisui's smiling face looked somehow lonely.

*

While he listened to Sasuke breathing sound asleep next to him, Itachi lied down on his mattress. More than a year had passed since they moved in the new district, and he had become surprisingly accustomed to see also the ceiling of his bedroom.

Opposite to the bedroom where the two children slept, there was the family's dining table. Fugaku and Mikoto must have been the only two people in there.

«Itachi's grades are amazing»

He could hear his mother's voice coming from the other side of the closed panels.

Apparently she thought that the children were already sleeping. Without listening, Itachi stared absentmindedly at the ceiling.

«As expected from my child.»

«Ah, that's true.»

He was being praised by his father. And his mother was delighted for that.

It wasn't a bad sensation.

«What about school?»

«What do you mean, since his grades are so outstanding...»

«That's not what I mean.»

His father cut off his mother's words.

«Does he have friends?»

«He doesn't talk very much about friends, that kid.»

«He doesn't enjoy himself.»

«That's not a bad thing.»

«But his time is passing. Apparently he's impatient because he wants to become old enough for being shinobi quickly.»

They had seen through him...

His face became just a little hot.

«I think that sometimes even I, his parent, should learn from his sincere attitude towards being a shinobi. But a thread that stretches too much is fragile. I'm worried that it could break with the rebound.»

«That child is a gentle kid. You'd know if you saw Itachi when he's comforting Sasuke. That child is all right. Besides, it seems that recently he's grown to love Shisui like an older brother, and they train together, so he has a friend.»

«Shisui of the Body-Flicker...»

Even Itachi knew that Shisui, who recently had made his name as a shinobi, was called "Body-Flicker".

«It's good that he has an older friend, but he should talk with friends of his age, and also get to know that feeling called enjoyment.»

«In that kid's case, he can.»

Friends of his age...

The face of the girl who had called him suddenly after school floated on Itachi's mind.

«Uchiha Izumi...»

Muttering the girl's name, Itachi closed his eyes peacefully.

*

Half year had passed since he entered the Academy.

Itachi's name was renowned through the whole school.

A genius since the foundation of the school. Itachi's excellence stood out of the crowd so much that there were teachers and students that had become calling him like that.

He didn't learn anything from the lesson that the first year students were given, so the teacher assigned special homework and tests to Itachi only. And yet, in front of Itachi who completed them quietly, also the teachers were in a situation in which they had given up.

He had thoroughly reached a genin's level.

With the teacher's unanimous decision, it had still been settled that he would graduated in one year when more than four months had passed since he had entered.

The Village of the Hidden Leaf, which was impoverished by the previous Great War and the Nine-Tails's attack, had been urgently asked to guarantee talented people. That's why even at the Academy only some of the students that the teachers considered especially gifted could take the graduation test without waiting for the end of the term, as special cases. It had been decided that if they passed the test, they would begin their missions as genin attending at the graduation ceremony of the ones above them.

Naturally, Itachi passed the graduation test.

The test was on the Clone Technique.

Thanks to Shisui's guidance before the Academy, he had perfectly mastered it.

"In your case, you'll do just fine immediately as a shinobi"

Saying this, Shisui, who know Itachi's desire of becoming a shinobi quickly, had helped him with the Clone practice.

Half year of school life left...

Itachi's graduation had already been decided.

«Oi, you!»

Itachi heard a voice from behind who called him, and stopped as he was passing through the corridor.

«Is it you? Uchiha Itachi»

There were three students of a class above his.

Maybe seniors.

Itachi had devoted his whole life to training for living as a shinobi. He absolutely had not strength left for unnecessary things. It was at best enough to remember the names of the students of his own class. He didn't remember anything like the students of the other classes or the ones above. For this reason, he had guessed that the older boys in front of his eyes were seniors by their stature.

The average age for graduating at the Academy was twelve.

Their physical constitution was completely different from seven-year-old Itachi's. They were standing in front of his eyes and were positioned so that he had to raise his eyes to look at them.

«You, do you know who we are?»

«No»

At Itachi, who had answered unperturbedly, the older boy standing in the middle who had been speaking the whole time furrowed.

«The rumours are true, you are an impertinent dude.»

The older boy had a surprisingly short nose and narrow eyes.

«I'm Izumo Tenma. They call me "Speedy Runner Tenma", and there's no one that doesn't know me in the school.»

"I didn't know you" was on the tip of his tongue, but Itachi took it back with a gulp, and stared at the older boy called Tenma.

«Shall we do it?» said the boy with drooping eyes standing at Tenma's right. Paying attention to Tenma, he fidgeted.

«Don't be so impatient, Katsura.»

The boy called Katsura cast a flattering smile to Tenma.

«You, do you know why we called you?» the boy at Tenma's left asked Itachi while raising his right eyebrow with all his strength. He was the tallest of the three.

«Well...»

«The hell did you say, sucker?»

«Wait Hagiri»

Tenma held Hagiri back, who had bent forward.

«We'll teach this guy the manners of this school *carefully*, you're so hasty, aren't you»

While saying so, Tenma took a step forward and stood in front of Itachi.

«The hierarchies in the shinobi world are important, you know?»

«In a mission of a standard four-men cell of shinobi, the orders of the Jōnin and Chūnin that are assigned by superior officers are absolute. Therefore politeness and the order of senior and junior are the core of a shinobi.»

«A clear answer is appropriate for an honour student. But...»

Malice spread across Tenma's face.

«I really can't stomach that sort of attitude»

Closing the distance so much that they could feel each other's breath, Tenma glared at him.

«Despite you're an Uchiha, you're really an eyesore»

«Did you really go that far ...» Hagiri muttered at Tenma's words, astonished. But in his voice there was evident derision.

Afraid of those three rude boys, no one of the other students got near.

It was lunch break.

All the teachers had gone back to the teacher's lounge.

With the sense of superiority that they were ruling the place themselves, a wicked smile plastered on Tenma's mouth.

That impertinent guy in front of them was an underclass student after all. They had jumped to the conclusion that if they threatened him a little, he'd apologise crying.

Probably by acting like this until then they had made all the students of their own class and of the under classes obey. They weren't absolutely ashamed of threatening students five years younger than them.

The dim arrogance of their disposition oozed out of the faces of those three.

It wouldn't take him three minutes to beat up such foolish people.

They said that he was impertinent, but the main point was that they wanted to make Itachi surrender. Probably they wanted to satisfy their own vanity making a student of the underclass that had been labelled as an excellence burst into tears.

In that case, why hadn't they attacked him in the moment in which they had called him out?

This wasn't an ordinary school.

This was a training ground to become a shinobi.

When they thought to kill someone, they acted right away.

He was a shinobi, right?

These older students didn't understand that they were being protected by this structure called school.

They were completely off guard.

Itachi had some kunai concealed behind his back.

Rather conveniently, they were three.

He wouldn't even need to move from his spot. He would put his hand behind his back, grab the kunai and just thrust them in front of him, and Tenma and the other would collapse with a hole in their forehead.

But he didn't kill them.

Itachi considered how a shinobi would have acted in case he'd decided to kill them, but he didn't act like that, he didn't kill them.

The reason was simple.

Itachi didn't like fights. For this reason he had never had a fight so far. It would be impossible for him to really kill because of a fight. He needed to go easy on them. He was anxious whether he'd been able to go easy on them. He wondered if he would really kill them.

That's why he didn't kill them.

He should avoid useless fights.

But...

He also had no intention of being hit.

«It was you guys who made the Nine-Tails attack the village, right?»

At Tenma's words, his heartbeat increased.

«All the adults of the village think so. That The Uchiha clan made the Nine-Tails attack the village. You guys are a sly clan, that's why the criminal wasn't caught right away.

But the criminal is surely within the Uchiha clan. As a proof, also Hokage-sama and the others suspect you, that's why you were gathered at the margins of the village.»

«I don't know»

«You won't get away with a "I don't know"»

Tenma continued, furrowing even more.

«My father died during the Nine-Tails attack. His dad, too.»

Saying this, Tenma pointed at Katsura, who was standing behind him.

«How was it for you?»

Tenma asked Hagiri while scowling at Itachi.

«To protect my younger sister, my mother was squashed under some rubbles that were flying and right in front of me...»

Hagiri faltered.

Itachi remembered the scene when he had protected Sasuke and his mother.

He had jumped towards the huge rock that came flying without thinking it twice, and smashed it with all his strength.

"Did you just watch in silence your mother dying?"

"Couldn't you do like me?"

He wanted to ask this to Hagiri.

You have to be strong to protect someone, to sweep away your sorrow.

«The Uchiha clan is our enemy. In other words, you are the enemy that we had to hate because you killed our parents.»

A broad interpretation on top of false accusations...

Those were the origins of the war inside such human feelings.

He thought that they wanted to fill somehow that sense of loss of having lost an important person. The feeling that they didn't know how to express snatched away their normal judgement and went on a rampage.

And then hurt someone.

Every word of the older boys made Itachi suffer intensely.

«Apologise»

Tenma backed out. Then he yelled pointing at the space that formed between him and Itachi.

«Kneel on the ground here and apologise saying "I'm *sorry* for being from the Uchiha clan"!»

«I refuse» Itachi declared simply, deleting completely his feelings. The faces of the older boys changed immediately their colour. Their faces, which so far had flushed for their suffering emotions, upon hearing Itachi's words suddenly became pale.

That instant, the foolish impulse of letting out even their dreary feelings of having lost their relatives in the Nine-Tails accident while threatening that impertinent underclass student turned into a deep resentment against the person of Itachi.

«B-bastard...»

The hands of those three went behind their backs.

They grabbed the haft of their kunai.

Itachi watched the older boys while loosely hanging both his hands down.

He had no intention of fighting.

Should the necessity arise, he intended on letting them go past him with the Kawarimi no Jutsu using the Clone Technique.

Itachi's Kawarimi no Jutsu was original.

The usual Kawarimi no Jutsu deceives the opponent by replacing someone's body with a log in which a charm is pasted just before receiving the attack. However, in Itachi's case, instead of using a log he used countless crows.

He was struck by that idea while he studied with Shisui, seeing a murder of crows flying through a thick forest.

If you use a log as usual, the efficacy of misleading the opponent is weak. But crows scatter in all directions at the moment of the substitutions, so the opponent gets surprised and confused.

The opportunity generated couldn't match a log's.

This was the first time he tried it out in a real fight.

Will it do the trick...

The right moment was when all the three boys would throw their kunai at Itachi's body.

The respiration of the four boys became shallow.

Both Itachi and Tenma and the others studied the other's movements.

A frozen silence ran through the corridor of the lunch break.

«Stop that!»

The high-pitched yelling voice of a girl broke the silence.

Izumi was standing in front of Itachi.

While raising both her arms high, she went towards the older boys.

«I'm from the Uchiha clan, too! But I have no intention of apologising to you guys!

Because the Uchiha clan wasn't the one who invoked the Nine-Tails»

At this unexpected turn, Tenma and the others were dumbfounded.

«The Uchiha clan lives in the village as well. In the past riot people important to us died.

That's why...»

Also from her back it was clear that she was moved to tears.

«The culprit is not an Uchiha!»

«Move back» Tenma said with a stern expression.

«I won't move back» Izumi yelled with resolution.

«If it's so, you too... !»

Glaring at Izumi, Tenma's look changed.

«O-oi look there»

Katsura put a hand on Tenma's shoulder, and pointed at Izumi's face with the other hand.

«T-the Sharingan» Hagiri muttered with evident panic.

«R-run»

The moment Tenma said it, the three ran away watching their back.

«Are you okay?»

Both Izumi's eyes, who had turned around, were burning deep red.

A small circle had emerged inside her round eyes, and above it there was a comma-shaped pattern.

The most powerful ocular technique passed down in the Uchiha clan: the Sharingan...

«You...»

«I'm sorry I butted in»

Izumi's body gave out as she said it, smiling.

Rushing over her, he held her by her shoulders.

Izumi had fainted.

When Izumi, who had been put to sleep on a bed of the school infirmary, had regained consciousness, school had already finished. Izumi, who had just woken up, smiled embarrassed to Itachi, who had waited for her for the whole time after the classes had ended.

«Sorry, I did something useless.» Izumi apologised, blushing till the tip of her ears.

«Useless?»

«Because it was you, Itachi-kun. I've been kinda an intrusion.»

«I made it thanks to you.»

Surely it was as Izumi said. But thanks to Izumi's eyes those three ran away without doing anything.

«I got angry and while I don't understand it myself, they became those eyes.»

«How did you awakened it?»

Itachi hadn't awakened his Sharingan yet.

Apparently the trigger was in the mind, but even Shisui hadn't taught him about it.

For Itachi, who was good at everything above the average of shinobi, the fact that he hadn't awakened the Sharingan was an unbearable reality.

Izumi did...

He wanted to know why.

«My father died during the past Nine-Tails accident...»

He came to know it for the first time.

Izumi's father was in the Uchiha clan. In that case, it was very likely that he had worked under Itachi's father. He had never heard any story of someone who died at his post as his father's subordinate.

«Ah, my father wasn't from the Uchiha clan. My mother was an Uchiha. My father died so we came back to the clan, and I became an Uchiha as well.» Izumi said as if she had read Itachi's mind.

«Is your Sharingan connected to your father's death?»

«Yeah»

Izumi took a short breath once, and started talking looking at Itachi's eyes.

Her eyes had gone back to normal.

«I, when my father died, was near him. My father died in front of my eyes, protecting me. That's why I...»

Tears wet Izumi's cheeks.

«“If only I had been stronger, my father wouldn't have died”... even during the funeral, even after that I tortured myself the whole time. “If only I had been stronger”»

With the expression of someone who couldn't take it anymore, Izumi hung her head in shame.

«Then suddenly something pulsed with a *thump* inside my eyes. Chakra rapidly gathered in my eyes, and I fell senseless. When I came to, my mother was there, and told me that it was the Sharingan.»

«Is that so... I'm sorry for having made you remember such painful thing.»

«No, don't worry.»

Izumi smiled.

Itachi held out his right hand.

Izumi, perplexed, tilted her head to the right.

He waited silently.

A white thin hand came out of the mattress, and slowly lifted.

He clutched to her white thin palm.

«Thank you»

At Itachi's words, Izumi smiled a little.

*

Abandoning the white file on the desk, Danzō looked at the subordinate that was standing in front of him.

The subordinate was wearing the mask of a tiger painted white. The red colour that spread at left and right from the opening for the eyes was lifted up as if it was expressing anger.

«Uchiha Itachi...»

The photo linked in the file was the face of a still young boy. In his eyes, as if he was staring at Danzō, there was a power that didn't seem that of a young boy's.

«*I heard from here and there that his reputation is “the genius since the foundation of the Academy”. He passed the graduation test after only four months since his entrance, and his graduation has been decided for next spring.*»

While listening to his subordinate's voice, who was awfully stiff, Danzō looked down on the file, and a smile rose on his mouth.

«A battle of possession in every department will rise for his eyes.»

«Yes»

He lifted his heavy back from the chair.

Also Danzō, who kept shouldering the darkness of the village as the shadow of the Third Hokage, felt bitterly the heaviness of his own body nowadays. He wasn't old to the point of sensing the hour of his death, but he was in an age in which he thought that his days were counted.

Ten years ahead, twenty years ahead...

Of course he would die.

There was something he had to achieve by that time.

Severing the root of evil of when the village was born was Danzō's lifetime job.

«A genius that has not been infected by anything yet...»

Danzō turned his eyes towards the darkness outside the window. As if indulging on the transient harmony, the darkness had sunk into a deep silence. A person who lived in a time of war yearned a night in which the thirst of blood whirled.

«First of all, let's meet him.»

4

«...Even though the Great War ended, we can't say that even now the world has reached peace yet, and at the present condition here and there people are going through painful times due to the sad events of two years ago. How will we stop that? I don't think it's somebody else's problem, also for us young shinobi. Today, we take a step forward as shinobi. Living in this world in turmoil as shinobi is never an easy path. Even so, we take an oath here. A shinobi voluntarily ventures on a relentless road. A shinobi endures. With all the things we learned at the Academy as our nourishment, we will carry out our own ninja way as Konoha shinobi.»

Reading it out loud, Itachi slowly rolled the paper roll. Then with an extensive look he looked out over the caretakers and the teachers, the graduates and the enrolled students that were standing in a line under his eyes.

«The valedictorian, Uchiha Itachi.»

From his entrance to the graduation all his grades had been excellent.

He passed the graduation test on the fourth month of his school life.

Although at the time of emergency during the Great War there had been some exceptions like Hatake Kakashi, he was the youngest graduation student and top student of the post-war Academy.

Itachi's student life closed its curtain in this way.

Apparently there had been a lot of disputes among the teachers on the fact that Itachi would read the formal reply as the representative of the graduates.

Most of the graduates were twelve years old.

There were people who graduated achieving excellent grades and being younger like Itachi, but still Itachi, being a seven-year-old, was the youngest. Even if Itachi's thoughts and grades didn't look like those of a seven-year-old's, and he had the skills of a shinobi, they wondered if he wouldn't look like too much of a child on the other graduates' point of view.

And another thing...

Mainly the teachers of a family lineage that came from the Senju clan complained because Itachi was born into the Uchiha clan.

However, in the end it turned out that both the problem of his age and the discrimination against the Uchiha prostrated in front of Itachi's overwhelming ability and grades, which surpassed the others completely.

It was unlikely that there would be a representative other than Itachi.

Itachi walked straight ahead in the schoolyard in which the petals of the cherry blossom fluttered about.

There were three people in front of him.

His father, with his mouth turned down at the corners and his arms crossed even in such happy place. His mother, who welcomed him with a gentle smile next to him. And his younger brother, who was simply enjoying walking next to them.

His family.

Sasuke, spotting the figure of his brother among the crowd of people that were going back and forth, opened his round and cute eyes wide.

«Nii!» he shouted in a clear voice. His mother had instructed Sasuke to call Itachi “*oniichan*”, but he wasn't able to talk properly yet so it became “*nii*”. But when he looked at his brother calling him and walking looking glad, he became incredibly happy. A human being that loved him unconditionally...

For Itachi, Sasuke was an existence that, as an older brother, he had to protect unconditionally.

From behind Sasuke, who walked waddling with a cheerful smiling face, his mother followed him holding his hand.

«Watch out, Sasuke.» he called out to him with a gentle tone.

Suddenly, Sasuke's figure disappeared from his field of vision.

In front of his eyes, someone blocked his way.

A man...

He was a dark man. He couldn't express well with words what was dark in him.

Somehow, all in that man was dark.

«Are you Uchiha Itachi?» the man asked while looking down on him.

The right half of his face was concealed by bandages. He was all dressed in black robes, but a white garment, which he wore under those and was exposed only from his right shoulder to his arm, could be seen.

Only his left eye examined Itachi carefully.

«I see...»

Itachi sustained the man's gaze straight on, who looked like as if he was clad with an auspicious omen. Behind the man, his mother clutched Sasuke's shoulder, who was trying to walk.

«You have an evil countenance.»

«Evil countenance?»

«A countenance that invokes war. These creases»

Saying this, the man pointed at the creases that ran through Itachi's cheeks from the inner corners of his eyes.

«During your life, war will always follow you around.»

Only one stain that had been cast on his formal day...

Who the heck was this man?

«I want to ask one thing to the genius since the foundation of the Academy.»

He waited silently for the man's words.

«There are ten people, who are fellowmen, on a shipwreck. One of them suffers from a bad epidemic disease. If he keeps living, also the other nine people will die for his disease. If you were the leader of this ship, what decision would you take?»

The question of why he asked him, who had met for the first time, such thing flitted across his mind. But a second later the answer presented itself.

Itachi spat up his own thoughts with brief words.

«It's destiny that the person who suffers from the disease would die anyway. If I were the leader, I should think with maximum priority about saving the lives of the nine people left. I'd choose the path of saving nine people by killing just one of them.»

The man made a bold smile.

«It's a clear answer.»

The man stepped forth and got closer to Itachi.

«I'm looking forward to the day we'll meet again.» the man said with a voice similar to a whisper when he passed at Itachi's side. At the reverberation of so much evil, he felt as if his mind had been contaminated by darkness.

«Itachi...»

His mother, who was holding Sasuke in her arms, rushed over him.

«What did he tell you?» his father, who had approached behind his mother before he noticed it, asked Itachi.

«Nothing important»

«Is that so...»

Saying so, his father pointed his eyes far behind him.

«Who's that man?»

«Shimura Danzō... one of the Third's close aides.»

A dark shadow lurked on Fugaku's voice, who had answered to Itachi's question.

“During your life, war will always follow you around...”

The words that Danzō told him earlier were stuck into his mind, becoming a stabbing thorn.

While putting a hand on his throbbing shoulder, Itachi fixed his eyes on the man's distant back until he disappeared.

Itachi's true story: Book of Bright Light

Chapter 2 – The brilliant chick doesn't know the silence after the dusk

1

«From now on, you three will work at my side as genin. Sometimes there will be rigid missions. Everyone, let's rely on our comrades and escape from the verge of death!» a forty-year-old man, who was tying his forehead protector tightly so much that he began to worry if it wasn't uneasy, yelled out loud standing before Itachi and the others.

Minazuki Yūki.

He was the man that had been entrusted as the jōnin in charge of the three of them, Itachi and the others, who had just graduated from the Academy.

He had a sweltering face that contrasted with his elegant name. Below his forehead protector, that was tied so that it sunk into his short, deep black hair, his eyebrows were similar to a worn out broom. His eyes, below his ruffled eyebrows, were perfect circles just like a fish's, his nose was large and despite his bulky lips his mouth was awfully short.

«What, relying on comrades...» the genin that was sitting next to Itachi said with an inaudible voice.

Izumo Tenma...

Back in his Academy days, he was the leader of that group of three that had tried to force Itachi to kneel down on the ground. Without consideration for Yūki, who continued his speech slipping over him, Tenma stared fixedly at Itachi while sitting hugging his knees. «There's a clan that is the burden of the village in this team, and to hell with teamwork, too.»

«Hey you, you've been chattering for quite a while, cut that out!» a young girl shouted, interrupting Yūki's speech.

There was another person sitting opposite to Tenma.

Her name was Inari Shinko.

She was in the same class as Tenma.

«From the school days you were always saying annoying things about Itachi, but he already became a genin. Can't you be hesitant to say such small things for once!»

«Shut up! That's because you're a woman. I mean, you've been worrying about him since you went to school, but I got lost in the middle of your speech since your accent is awful.»

«I moved in Konoha only three years ago, so I can't help it!» Shinko yelled, pouting.

«You two, will you cut it out?»

Yūki calmed the two, flustered. However, the two kept glaring at each other not worrying about stopping their quarrel.

«Women, their faces become kind for a good-looking man.»

«W-why shouldn't I stick up for Itachi in such thing? Itachi is substantially a seven-year-old. I'm thirteen, you know? It's not that I'm in love with him.»

«Something like age is not related to love!»

«W-what the hell are you saying...»

«Fuu»

At the too much deplorable image of those three, a sigh unconsciously escaped from Itachi's mouth.

Tenma, who noticed it, was pissed off.

«You bastard, what are you scandalised about!»

He couldn't handle it any longer...

Itachi stood up with his eyes closed.

«Don't run away, you bastard!»

«Itachi-kun too, won't you give this moron a piece of your mind!»

As he ignored their voices, he looked at Yūki's face.

«Do we listen to introductions only today?»

«Y-yeah...»

Apparently Yūki paid more attention to Itachi, being obviously the youngest of the team.

«If it's so, today's schedule is already completed, isn't it?»

«T-that's right.»

«In that case, excuse me»

«F-from tomorrow we'll be in official missions, so don't be late for the time of the meeting.»

He stopped his feet as he tried to leave, and looked at Yūki over his shoulder.

«I understand.»

«Don't run away, you bastard!» Tenma yelled as he stood up.

«You hadn't finished talking with me yet!»

Shinko grabbed the cuff of Tenma's trousers.

«What the hell are you doing»

«Shut up for good, you!»

While hearing the quarrel of those two, Itachi didn't turn his head back again.

It was going to be a hard going.

*

«Are you going back now?»

He called out to a familiar back.

The face that turned around, the moment Itachi was detected, became suddenly bright.

«Itachi-kun»

It was Uchiha Izumi.

«Were you on a mission today?»

«The introduction's ended. Missions are starting from tomorrow»

«Hmm»

Izumi was still attending the Academy. If he thought that he had been attending the school just until one month ago, he was overcome by nostalgia.

Their destination was the same. The Uchiha district. They both walked side by side.

«How are your comrades?»

«It's that older boy.»

«Eh?»

«Out of the three you attacked for me, he's the louder one.»

Thereupon, Izumi realised it.

«A-attacked...»

When he looked at Izumi, who had cast his eyes down as if she didn't know how to say, he suddenly laughed with all his heart. When Itachi burst into laughter, Izumi stared at him with wide eyes.

«Why are you laughing?»

«For some reason you looked funny.»

«“For some reason”, that's cruel...»

«Sorry»

This time they both laughed. Despite they hadn't said something funny, they both laughed together without knowing why.

«Did you become able to use the Sharingan?»

«If I'd been able to do such thing, I'd also have graduated from the school after you, Itachi-kun»

Without looking at Izumi, who pouted looking frustrated, Itachi took a step forward.

«I haven't even awakened it yet.»

«But despite that you graduated from the school and you are a genin. I wonder what kind of shinobi you'd have become if you had awakened the Sharingan»

«Ah, come on»

The wall that marked off the Uchiha clan's district appeared in front of them as they were talking. On the splendid doors of the tile-roofed gate that separated the village and the district, the Uchiha's family crest had been painted.

«Aren't the adults somehow scary these days?» Izumi asked quietly as they get closer to it step by step.

«Did you hear something?»

«Uhhh»

Izumi shook his head.

«But, when I walk around the district, there's suddenly something scary...»

Izumi was seven and had awakened the Sharingan. Even if she wasn't able to master it perfectly yet, she must have perfectly learned a shinobi's basic training.

By nature, the Uchiha clan was a clan keen on sensations. Izumi's instinct had begun to make this ability bloom already, so that wasn't necessarily an idea too wild to say.

«What's scary?» he asked a frightened Izumi gently.

«The adults, they're thinking something unpleasant, aren't they...»

Something unpleasant...

It was surely a childish rumour, so it was all the more realistic.

The faces of the three subordinates that went back and forth at his father's floated on Itachi's mind. When the Fourth Hokage was decided, that time of the problem of moving into the district after the Nine-Tails affair, and at the meetings in the Naka Shrine where his father went frequently...

He couldn't help but think that all these things looked like events that confirmed Izumi's instinct.

«Izumi»

As they passed under the gate of the district, Itachi called his friend's name. With his eyes still pointed towards the direction they were going, he wasn't looking at Izumi's face.

«You'd better not say the things we're talking about now to other people.»

«Y-yeah...» Izumi nodded feebly.

«If you say so, Itachi-kun, I'll do it...»

After that, neither of them said anything, and they went back each one to their own house.

2

Countless crows attacked the enemy.

Surrounded by a crowd of beaks so dense that they left no opening to escape, the big adult shrieked.

The enemy was successfully caught by Itachi's Shadow Clone.

«Now!» Itachi yelled from above a tree that was far away from the murder of crows. He watched from above as the enemy kept shrieking, and Tenma had frozen in shock at his feet. And there were Yūki and Shinko's standing figures, surrounding the two.

«Let's go, Shinko!»

«Yes»

The moment they threw themselves upon the enemy, the crows disappeared inside the wood, flying high.

«Gyaaaa!»

The enemy collapsed howling in his bitter death agony.

When he made sure of the surroundings, Itachi quietly jumped off from the branch.

«It was a good decision, Itachi-kun»

Saying this, Yūki clapped his hands. Tenma stood up while looking resentfully at him.

Not caring about the men, Shinko made sure of the condition of the dead enemy.

They had discovered that one peddler of the vegetable sellers that went in and out of the Village of the Hidden Leaf was a member of Iwagakure's intelligence corps. Itachi and the others of Team Two had been given the imperative order of getting rid of him, and they had left the village.

The obliteration of the intelligence corps of an enemy country was an Anbu's occupation. But this time there was none of them left in the village since the Anbu had been recruited for an important matter.

The affair of the attempted kidnapping of Hyūga Hinata...

A shinobi higher-up of the Village of the Hidden Cloud, which was hostile to Konoha many years before, had come in visit to conclude an alliance. The village was wrapped in a mood of celebration, but that night the incident occurred: the daughter of the head of the Hyūga clan, Hinata, was almost kidnapped. The perpetrator was killed, and they managed to avoid further problems, but with the fact that his true identity was the shinobi higher-up from Kumo the situation expanded until it became a problem between the villages. The Village of the Hidden Cloud, which had his own shinobi higher-up killed, submitted the unyielding condition that they had to hand over the corpse of the head of Hyūga's family. Konoha somehow averted the circumstances of war by presenting the younger brother of the head of the family pretending he was the head of the family himself.

The Anbu had been entirely recruited for this state of emergency, also the main shinobi of the village couldn't act carelessly in this situation in which a war was about to break out at any moment.

Nevertheless, it was impossible that they'd let the Iwa spy slip from under their nose.

Therefore, Team Two had been selected among the others.

Actually, rather than Team Two, **Itachi** had been selected.

Itachi's true strength was even said to be no match for a chūnin, even if he was just seven. Konoha's headquarters had an eye on him.

Actually, the work was going well.

The spy had fallen into the trap Itachi had set outside the village so easily, and he had revealed his position himself. Itachi and the others of Team Two, who had hurried there, took the formation that surrounded the man with Itachi in the lead, and drove him into a corner.

Tenma was here, impatient.

The mission was nothing special if he just had to drive him into a corner spending the time running out of patience, but Tenma, who was impatient to succeed, stood out. Just like the saying "a cornered rat will bite the cat", the frantic offensive of the spy attacked Tenma's throat.

Itachi had come to save him by a hair's breadth.

The kunai of the spy had pierced Itachi. But, it was a Kawarimi no Jutsu. It had turned into countless crows, and they had attacked the enemy.

You already know the rest.

«Looks like he's not disguised himself.» Shinko muttered, who had crouched in front of the spy's corpse. Shinko, who had learned mainly medical ninjutsu at school, was a ninja assigned to his team for times like this. With the presence or absence of an enemy's disguise, the information on poisons, and the medical treatment of the comrades, medical ninjutsu were indispensable in a unit.

«Is that so? How lucky»

Without paying attention to Yūki's exclamation of relief, Shinko, who had got up, looked at Tenma with her arms akimbo.

«You, ain't there something you should say to Itachi?»

«Eeh?»

While raising one of his eyebrows with all his strength, Tenma looked the other way.

«If it hadn't been for Itachi's quick wittedness, you'd be dead right now. Shouldn't you say at least one "thank you"?»

«That's because I don't understand what you're saying.»

«Really, a person like you...»

Shinko made a step forward towards Tenma, breathing through her nose.

He forced his way through the space between the two.

He held out his right hand in front of Shinko.

«It doesn't matter»

«But substantially this man gets so cocky because you're taking such attitude. Even if you're younger you are a genin, too, so you should tell him off even more.»

«It's okay, Shinko.»

Shinko looked at Itachi, who was wearing a smile on his mouth, and sighed.

«Do as you like.»

Yūki watched with a nervous look Shinko, who had said this turning her back on him.

«Even if I wasn't rescued by you in particular, I didn't suffer damage.»

«Aah»

Thirst for blood...

Itachi followed its source calmly.

It was Tenma.

His fist was directed straight towards him.

He grabbed Tenma's fist with the slightest movement.

«This attitude of seeing through everything and anything, I really can't stomach it...»

Tenma muttered making a gritting sound with his clenched teeth.

«If I apologise, will you feel better?»

«I told you that that sort of reply makes me *sick*!»

Shaking his fist free, this time he threw a kick.

He avoided it by bending just his bust backward.

With the momentum of his foot that kicked off the empty sky, Tenma's body revolved at least twice. Then he turned his back to Itachi, and fell down heavily.

«Even my taijutsu didn't reach you...» Tenma muttered with his back still turned at him.

«You, who can do anything and everything, don't understand how I feel.»

He couldn't find the right words.

«I think I'm sorry for that thing at school. And for what I did just now...»

Tenma didn't move, his eyes still looking downward.

Itachi stared at his round back silently.

«Thank you.»

*

«Come in.»

While his father pushed his back, Itachi touched the closed sliding door. On the other side of the spotless paper of the sliding door, there was a deadly silence. And yet, on the other side of the single sheet of the closed paper door a marked presence, so strong that it was transmitted through his skin, was muttering.

A disturbing presence...

Even before he opened the door, Itachi's heart had already sunk.

«Itachi» his father urged him.

He reluctantly opened the door.

People filled the hall of about fifteen tatami mats.

There was no illumination, so they were all black shadows.

«I kept you waiting»

While urging Itachi inside the room, also his father walked through the door. Then he closed the paper door behind him.

It became even darker than darkness itself.

Several unknown human shadows got up, and lighted simultaneously the fire of some candles that had been set up in the four corners of the room.

«Sit there and listen.»

His father pointed to the lowest seat. The floor, which was completely occupied by those people, was empty only there. Itachi walked to the place that had been showed to him pushing his way through the people, and sat there quietly. His father, who surveyed with his eyes his son settling down, went to the chief seat pushing his way through everyone, and sat down facing all of them.

«I open this regular meeting from now.» Yashiro, who was sitting at his father's right, proclaimed, and continued.

«From now on, also Itachi, Fugaku-dono's son, will participate.»

«My son is seven. He attained the position of genin, which is qualification for joining the meetings, but he's still a novice. It has been decided that I'll let him take part in them with the selfish desire, as his father, to make the clan's present condition known to him from a very young age. Please look after him.»

Saying this, Fugaku lowered his head. All the people in front of him replied bowing their heads at once.

«Well then, I think we'll talk about the topic "submission of the written complaint to the Hokage against the clan's isolation district", continuing from the last time.»

Without finishing listening to Yashiro's words, all the participants began talking at once. People who ought to show their stubborn attitude against Konoha, people who said that they had to advance quietly making sure of the circumstances calmly, people who guessed from everyone's expression which opinion they should agree with. Even if each speculation was different, it seemed that everyone thought that they wanted to actively take part in this place.

Suddenly he felt someone's gaze on him.

Itachi immediately shifted his eyes to it.

It was Shisui.

His eyes met with Shisui, who had sunk into silence with a look of someone that couldn't get used to the atmosphere of that noisy place.

At the smiling face of his close friend, he felt an indescribable feeling of loneliness.

The evil feelings of the clan were whirling here.

Also Itachi couldn't get used to it.

Even I have the same feeling...

In his smile in response to Shisui, Itachi put his own heart.

3

A year was about to pass since he had graduated from the Academy.

Itachi turned eight.

His career as a shinobi was doing well. His missions weren't particularly rigid, and thinking back now the mission in which they got rid of the Iwa spy that he had been given for the first time since he had become a genin seemed almost the most difficult one. His relationship with his comrades was as usual.

Even now Tenma hadn't opened his heart to him, and Shinko lashed out at him, irritated by such behaviour. Yūki watched over them while rushing up and down. Itachi acted as if it was nothing special, and loitered in his place alone.

He thought that his awkward team was somehow unnatural, but even so if in a year you repeat the same things over and over, those became normal. As they were they couldn't completely open their heart mutually, and while they were able to peacefully complete their missions somehow, Itachi thought that he was satisfied with that.

Because he had no intention of staying in this place for long.

He would build his career, he would become a chūnin and a jōnin, and he would eradicate all the conflicts of this world as a shinobi that surpasses everyone else. For this purpose Itachi couldn't stop. Rather than worrying thinking about such things as comrades and the jōnin in charge, he put his whole heart into improving himself. That's why when the mission could be handled well enough, it was right.

But if there was even one thing that he wasn't satisfied with, Yūki wouldn't have recommended Itachi for this year's Chūnin Selection Exam.

The reason was that Yūki said that Tenma and Shinko hadn't reached the level of taking the Chūnin Exam yet. The requirement for entering the Chūnin Exam was the standard team of a three men cell.

When he came to know that he couldn't take the Chūnin Exam, Itachi pressed Yūki unusually.

Yūki, who was usually irresponsible (no matter what he said, it was a waste of effort), showed an unyielding attitude just this time and pushed Itachi aside. With a look that really said he had turned a deaf ear to him, this year persisting was futile.

Itachi had no choice but give up.

Even if he couldn't take part to the Chūnin Exam, if he had the recommendation of a higher-up or a jōnin, he would have also a way to be able to become directly a chūnin. Actually, if they checked Team Two's activities and achievements, it was obvious how much Itachi contributed to the team. The fact that he had learned to the highest level all the ninja techniques from ninjutsu to hand to hand techniques, and he had a discernment that surpassed even his jōnin in charge, had saved the team out of a crisis on countless occasions.

Surely I'll get recommendation form a higher-up...

Confiding in this, Itachi spent every day working vigorously at the missions in front of him.

«Since the war ended the tension of each country has been easing, so the traffic between the countries has become considerably safe. For this reason a mission like this has been assigned to a team that mainly consists on genin.» Yūki said while casting his eyes to the document he was holding. Also Itachi was holding a similar thing.

“Mission to escort the daimyō of the Land of Fire”

The Village of the Hidden Leaf was within the Land of Fire. The one who ruled the Land of Fire was the “daimyō”.

The Village of the Hidden Leaf, although it was within the Land of Fire, had achieved a partial independence having the characteristic government structure that has the “Hokage” as leader. The daimyō of the Land of Fire was in higher position than the Hokage on paper, but given that the military strength of the country depended on the Konoha shinobi, the relationship between them was more like alliance of the same status rather than master and servant.

It had been arranged that this daimyō of the Land of Fire would visit the Village of the Hidden Leaf once a year.

It was a regular event. It was a very important event for both of them, who did it dutifully even during the Great War.

Team Two had been entrusted with the escort of this daimyō along the way.

«Will the four of us escort him?» Tenma said while looking at the documents.

«On the surface it'll look like that. But behind the scenes it has been decided that one Anbu four-man cell will watch over us from the shadows, and on the first place the daimyō will have his special “Twelve Guardian Ninja” escort unit, which gathers only efficient people from the shinobi within the country.»

«So it means that we're guards pro forma.»

«Well, that's right.»

Yūki nodded answering Shinko's question, and added some words.

«For the responsibility of guarding the daimyō since the journey became safe after the Great War ended, this year a team with an enrolled genin who did an extremely remarkable activity has been selected. In other words this mission is an enormous honour.»

Tenma's and Shinko's eyes went simultaneously towards Itachi. Even if he felt their gaze, Itachi kept silently his eyes lowered to his document.

«The meeting is tomorrow morning at four. The place is the Aun gates. Don't be late.»

Both Tenma and Shinko answered. Also Itachi nodded wordlessly.

«Well then, disperse!»

Saying so, Yūki disappeared.

Only the three genin were left.

Tenma's gaze was turned towards Itachi.

«As I thought, you're the village's pet.»

«You shouldn't use such tone!»

«Tch»

As usual...

Should I stay here next year?

A sigh was about to escape from him. But he thought he was in front of them, and gulped it down when it was on the verge of his mouth. When he stood up with the strength to suppress his sigh, he opened his mouth towards them.

«Well then, see you tomorrow»

He disappeared faster than he said it.

«Always putting on airs...»

Just before he left, Tenma's abusive language arrived to his ears just like an echo.

*

«I think this every year, the Village of the Hidden leaf is far~»

The old man who was sitting on a stump muttered while staring at the teacup in his hands.

Below his face wrinkled with age, he wore a traditional cap shaped as a fan. He was an ordinary old man that only glossed his luxurious body with gorgeous clothes.

He was the daimyō of the Land of Fire.

Behind the old man, a magnificent palanquin was waiting for its owner's return. Around it, there were two people of the Twelve Guardian Ninja, and a dozen of attendants of the escort. And then, there were Itachi and everyone from Team Two.

There was a highway that connected the capital of the Land of Fire to the Village of the Hidden Leaf. They had already covered half of the distance, and they would draw near the village soon for sure. Also the road, which was flat in the outskirts of the capital, had begun to show the steepness of a mountain trail.

A verdurous wood was concealing the party.

«If we don't hurry we won't make it to Konoha before night.» Yūki said with a timid look. Tenma and Shinko stared with an amazed expression the figure of the jōnin fussing about the Twelve Guardian Ninja while lowering his face servilely.

«I see...»

The daimyō, who had let out a sigh, raised his heavy hips while swinging his fan-shaped cap placed on his head. Two of the Twelve Guardian Ninja that were guarding him grabbed both his arms.

«Minazuki-sensei» Itachi said while staring at the end of the road behind the exchanges between the daimyō and the others.

«What is it?» Yūki asked; the moment he thought of following Itachi's line of gaze, his eyes became stern, erasing his looseness of before.

At those two's change, also Tenma and Shinko stiffened.

«The daimyō...» Yūki said to the Twelve Guardian Ninja.

Two of the Twelve helped the daimyō into the palanquin holding him from left and right. The four of Team Two jumped before the daimyō and the others, Yūki first, and spread in a diamond formation.

In front of where the four were staring at, there was a man. He was drawing near them with a rhythmical cadence, as if he was skipping.

If they looked at his appearance only, he wasn't particularly suspicious.

Then why were all four of them on alert?

The cause was in the man's face.

He was wearing an eccentric mask. It was painted orange, with an irregular pattern of black stripes. Since a pitch black hole had been opened near the right eye of the mask, the vision was ensured. His attire was a jet-black long coat from the opening of the collar to his knees. He had a white wide obi fastened somehow loosely.

It was an appearance that gave them the impression of a clown.

He wasn't a shinobi.

But...

Itachi's sixth sense told him that that man was sinister. His nervousness had been transmitted also to his three comrades.

«Oi, are you all right?» one of the Twelve asked from behind.

«We're checking, so please give me just a minute» Yūki answered.

Meanwhile, he idly stepped forward towards the man.

Suddenly the man raised his right arm.

«Err, there's a thing I want to ask you for a second, do you mind?»

He had an awfully flat voice. At the too much anticlimactic voice of that man, Yūki's face instinctively smiled.

«Today, this road is blocked. How did you enter?»

«Eh, is that so?»

The man spread both his hands exaggeratedly.

Everyone's eyes converged on the man.

A flickering of the atmosphere...

Itachi sensed a subtle disturbance of chakra.

«Minazuki-sensei!» he yelled too late.

A genjutsu.

In front of Itachi's eyes, who had promptly assumed a defensive stance, Yūki was standing bolt upright.

He felt through his skin that the presences behind him had stiffened. The daimyō and his close aides, and even the two of the Twelve Guardian Ninja had got caught in the genjutsu.

«Ooh, there's a guy who escaped from my genjutsu.»

The tone of the man changed. With a complete change, it turned from a tone of voice without energy of some time ago to a tone full of intelligence.

The hole that had been opened in the mask seized Itachi.

«Moreover, two people...»

«!»

At the fact that he wasn't the only one that had warded off the genjutsu, Itachi had his breath taken away. Then he immediately followed the chakra and the presence.

Nearby, something was crawling.

«You bastard, what the hell did you do!»

It was Tenma.

As soon as he noticed him, Tenma ran towards the man. Tenma's eyes, who was running, looked at Itachi for just a second.

«Genjutsu are my field of expertise. I won't fall for a jutsu of that sort!»

«Of that sort you say...»

The man muttered.

He was laughing...

It seemed to Itachi.

«A guy like this will last just an instant against the two of us!»

«Tenma!» he called to halt him.

«A shinobi who can't analyse calmly of the war potential of both parts...» the man muttered, and the kunai that Tenma had thrown stuck into his throat.

«...and who can't assess the situation objectively...»

«W-what's going on?» Tenma said, frightened.

It was natural.

Tenma's arm had been sucked up in the man's head, and had popped out from the back of his head. At first glance, it seemed that he had pierced his head, but there hadn't been even a hint of suffering from the man, and not a drop of blood was spilled. It was just as if Tenma's arm had slipped through the man.

«...dies.»

«Guh-blagh!»

Tenma emitted from his mouth an odd sound that didn't look like a human voice.

His body was floating in midair.

Its fulcrum was the arm of the man.

His arm had pierced through Tenma's body.

It wasn't a genjutsu.

As a proof of it, an immense quantity of fresh blood was flowing from Tenma's abdomen like a waterfall. Tenma, who was convulsing repeatedly twitching a little, was gradually becoming quiet, and in the end he became completely still.

«People who try to gain success by pushing forward recklessly die a premature death.

This is the reality of the world of shinobi.»

The man looked at Tenma's pupils, which were fixed into the empty sky.

«Even if you learn it now, it's too late...»

As he told him this, the man shook the arm that had pierced Tenma with all his strength.

With that movement the corpse left his arm, and was thrown onto the ground.

«As I thought you didn't feel for it... Moreover without charging foolishly at me like this brat, you tried to analyse calmly my and your abilities. Splendid, Uchiha Itachi»

«How did my name...»

«I think I know anything and everything about the Uchiha.»

The masked man drew near Itachi with a quick pace, completely different from the tottering manner of walking he used until then.

This footwork gave him the impression of a shinobi's.

«I'm aiming at the life of the old man over there. If you just stay still and watch quietly, I'll spare your life.»

«I'm a Konoha shinobi...»

He felt a pressure force as if he was being pressed hard. While he frantically opened his throat, Itachi threw up those words with all his might.

Just like a frog watched by a snake, his body didn't move as he wanted. Was it because of the man's wordless pressure? Did his instinct, which felt the difference between the opponent's and his own ability, refuse to fight against him? Or was all the blood of his body gathered in his head, frantically trying to analyse the inexplicable phenomenon that happened to the man's body?

At any rate, he was sure that his body didn't move.

In the situation he was left, he couldn't work out a clear solution...

It was the first time in his life he'd experienced such thing.

The masked man was next to him. In the middle of drawing closer to the daimyō, Itachi felt that he had stopped next to him.

«The words of some time ago, can you say them once again?»

Itachi said the words to the man, who had tilted his head, with a hoarse voice.

«I'm a Konoha shinobi.»

«Is that a declaration of your intention on dying?»

Die...

He thought it was vague.

«You can become a fine shinobi. There's no need for you to hasten your death here. But still if you tell me that you want to die, I won't stop you.»

"Move..." he ordered his body.

«Damn!»

At the same time a moan escaped from Itachi's mouth, somehow only his right arm moved. He hit his mask with his right hand, which wasn't holding even a kunai.

Just like that time with Tenma, his fist slipped through his face and popped out from behind. Despite it had to be surely in front of his eyes, he absolutely didn't feel it.

The suspicion that maybe he'd already fallen into the man's genjutsu was whirling in Itachi's mind.

«Is that so, do you want to die...»

The man's arm swung downward towards Itachi.

His palm, which had arrived just before his face, stopped.

In that position, the man looked to the sky above concealed by all kind of trees.

«That chakra» he muttered.

«Hatake Kakashi...»

The man's face, which was turned towards the empty sky, came down to Itachi.

«You narrowly escaped death, Uchiha Itachi»

The mask flickered.

The moment he thought that, an unbelievable thing happened.

The man was being sucked up into the hole opened on the mask. Just like the water of a bathtub in which the plug has been removed, the black body was being sucked up in the empty sky as if it had contracted on the spot before his very eyes, and in the end even the hole of the mask disappeared.

Four human silhouettes descended from the sky above Itachi, who was standing still dumbfounded.

They wore animal masks on their faces.

Anbu.

They were the elite group under the Hokage's direct control.

«Are you all right!?»

The shorter man among the four shook Itachi's shoulder.

He was a grey-haired boy wearing a fox mask.

«Oi! What happened?»

The other three went around him to release the genjutsu of the daimyō and the others.

The daimyō, who had woken up, shrieked finding Tenma's corpse.

«Suddenly everyone except me had fallen under a genjutsu, and I met an unexpected difficulty in doing a counter-technique. I'm sorry, I was too slow.»

Itachi stared in a daze as the young boy with the fox mask said these things.

«Hatake Kakashi...»

«How do you know this name?» the boy asked.

“The one in front of me is Kakashi” Itachi thought intuitively.

*

Even if he felt the warmth of the mattress in which his body was tucked, his trembling hadn't ceased.

The attack of the man looked like a memory of a far away day to him.

However, that was still an accident of few hours ago.

In such state of emergency the daimyō had gone back to the Land of Fire that same day, and the visit had been postponed. The Hokage and the others of the headquarters, who had received the report from the Anbu and Yūki, had decided that the report from Itachi would be done later. Itachi had returned to the village and had been brought back home immediately.

However, he didn't even feel like doing anything.

He didn't feel like eating supper, and went straight to bed. It was still early nightfall.

Even Sasuke was awake.

He was wrapped up in the mattress alone, and endured his incessant trembling.

In his heart, there was disappointment towards himself.

Tenma had died.

In front of his eyes.

Only he could have helped him.

And yet...

He didn't do anything.

«Is Itachi all right?»

From the other side of the sliding screen, he could hear his father's voice, who had just returned home.

«He even left his meal, entered into his room and went to sleep right away.»
«He's a full-fledged shinobi, too. There are times when a comrade dies in front of your eyes.»
«But that kid is still eight. It's true that the time for playing with friends is the Academy, but...»
«That only means that he's superior. The village has set an eye on him, so in this way he was able to take the mission of escorting the daimyō. It's an important mission, so he also did a dangerous experience. It's by surviving many times to bloodshed fighting battles that a shinobi becomes full-fledged.»
Slipping though the warmth of the mattress, his father's words pierced Itachi's heart.
Inexperience...
He was still not strong enough.
His comrade had died because he wasn't strong enough.
His father said those words because he wasn't strong enough.
He needed much more power.
Enough power to kill that man.
«Is it impossible for you to make that kid work by your side in the Military Police Force?»
«He can't join the Military Police Force.»
His father's words hollowed his chest.
«I'm thinking about his future, too. Also for make him realise it, I'll still make him work as a genin.»
«But, that kid...»
«It's okay, he'll surely get over it.»
As if to escape from his father's words, he grasped the mattress with all his might.
«Kuu—!»
An intolerable feeling overflowed from his mouth becoming an anguished moan.
His body trembled, shaking.
It wasn't that he was trembling because he was afraid. It was the rage towards his helpless self that made his body tremble. The sense of helplessness, the sense of defeat, the sense of despair. All these feelings against himself run about within his body and made Itachi tremble.
He needed power.
He lacked the amount enough to protect his comrades.
It wasn't even enough to reassure his father.
More, more...
To surpass even that masked man.
No, enough power to surpass every single man of this world.
Then he would trim the sprouts of all the conflicts with these hands.
He felt a hot thing behind his tightly closed eyelids.
They weren't tears.
It was something much hotter.

Thump...

Something pulsed hard near the base of his neck.

The thing as hot as fire was running within his body, now it gathered near the pulsation, and without stopping it streamed from there into his eyeballs.

It wasn't until then that Itachi became aware that the source of that burning power was chakra.

The people born in the Uchiha clan possessed a chakra that had fire properties. But never a human life until then had felt chakra hot to that extent. However, Itachi calmly reached the conclusion that something was about to happen in his body.

With his eyelids still closed he got out of the mattress with his bust, and raised his body. He sat on the mattress, and slowly opened his eyelids.

The awakening...

The scene was dyed red.

Anything and everything was different from the scenery he had been looking until that moment.

At the other side of the sliding screen, three flames of various sizes were swaying.

They were his mother's and his father's, and Sasuke's life forces.

He focused towards the flames.

The sliding screen faded, and he could see distinctly the room next to his.

There were three people inside the crimson scene. He had the feeling that if he concentrated straining his eyes onto that, even the beat of everybody's heart would be visible.

Dizziness...

He had wasted chakra.

He took a deep breath, closing his eyelids.

When he slowly opened his eyes, the scene had gone back as it was before.

«The Sharingan...»

He remembered the masked man.

His eye was visibly through the small hole that had been opened into that strange mask.

Itachi remembered clearly the three comma-shaped signs that had risen to the surface of his crimson eye.

«The next time I won't lose to him.» Itachi muttered; his eyes had turned crimson again.

4

Itachi softly placed his hand on the back the man that had been wielding a kunai against the void for a little while.

«Are you satisfied?»

As if he had been woken up from a dream by Itachi's murmuring voice, the man violently moved his shoulders up and down once, and turned around with his whole body.

«The thing you've been trying to kill for your dear life for a while was an illusion of mine.»

«W-what did you say...»

«Do you want to see that dream again?»

Both Itachi's eyes were dyed crimson.

«No, noo!»

The instant he saw the Sharingan, the man abandoned the kunai and crouched.

«Fo-forgive me!»

Itachi's eyes, who was looking down on the man begging him with tears streaming down, became black.

«Itachi!» a voice called behind him.

It was Yūki. Two shinobi followed him. They were the people who had joined the new Team Two.

After Tenma died, Shinko's spirit was broken by the heartless reality of the shinobi world. Then she renounced her shinobi qualification, and now she was working in a tea house of the village.

The new shinobi who joined him had both graduated from the Academy that year. They were his seniors at school, but it turned out that as shinobi Itachi was once year older than them.

«Did you capture him?»

«Yes.»

After answering Yūki, Itachi shifted his eyes back to the crouching man. Taking the two newcomers, who made an expression of relief, along, Yūki stood up in front of the man.

«You can't penetrate in a village and overstate your personal history just because "you want to become a shinobi". Because you can't become a shinobi like that.»

«S-sorry»

«By the way, this boy is still nine. There are many child like this one, but that's the world of shinobi.»

At Yūki's words, the man squeezed tightly and opened his eyes wide.

The inhabitants of the Land of Fire tried to become shinobi mixing up in the village. With this man's insurance, he had planted the fear towards the shinobi.

That was today's mission.

Of course its rank was the lowest D-rank.

The story was that it was inevitable because the mission matched the two newcomers.

But of course in some respects he wasn't satisfied.

More than three months had already passed in which he had started completing d-rank missions.

The pressing thought that he had his day offs to do that kind of things made Itachi impatient. Even training to get used to the Sharingan in such missions seemed foolish.

«Excellent, Itachi-senpai!» the newcomer young girl said in a gleeful voice. Despite being four years older than him, she called Itachi "senpai".

Her name was Himuka.

She had a face that didn't leave much of an impression.

There was another man.

It was three months he had become a comrade of Team Two. He had never seen him chatting.

His name was Yōji.

He was from the Aburame clan, but he had never seen him using his bugs so far.

«Well then, let's go back to the village.»

Yūki's cheerful voice made Itachi's heart heavier than ever.

*

«Fuu!»

Shisui took a breath full of ambition, and smiled looking at Itachi's direction.

«As I thought, I'm giving it all in this training with you.»

Looking at his friend talking cheerfully, Itachi felt that his mind and body were being replenished as he became drenched with sweat.

For roughly three hours he had been continuing their stern fighting, as to dispel the resentment he felt during his mission. After a break of about three minutes after they had settled a match, they had already gone through fifteen of them.

The result was six wins for Itachi, and nine wins for Shisui.

The rule was that they could do anything else as long as they didn't use the Sharingan.

The Sharingan was a great waste of chakra. They had disabled it just because wanted to carry out the fights for as long as possible.

The shuriken that they threw clashed in the sky, and flew in the wrong direction. Neither Itachi nor Shisui were looking at things like the direction in which they went. They were already flying towards the opponent, and reducing the distance between them.

«Tchi!»

«Ha!»

The yells of the two overlapped.

Their bodies, which had clashed in midair, crashed onto the ground entangling themselves together.

Shisui, who had quickly adjusted his stance, delivered a kick towards Itachi, who was sitting with one knee raised.

He held out his right arm and protected himself right away.

In Itachi's field of vision, who shook for the impact of the kick, there was the image of his friend agilely forming a seal.

«Fire Release: Great Fireball Technique!» Shisui yelled, and a huge fireball was spouted out from his mouth.

Itachi's lips, who was staring at the flame that was came flying towards him, took the shape of a smile.

As he had expected from Shisui...

His heart pounded.

The men who could emit such a tremendously huge fireball within his clan were probably only his father and Shisui, Itachi chuckled in his mind.

Now on his counterattack wouldn't make it in time.

Self-defence would also be late.

A direct hit.

«No way!»

Shisui yelled with a spontaneous look.

Itachi, who had been struck by the tremendous fireball, burst to smithereens, turned into innumerable crows, and attacked all at once.

Body Replacement Technique.

The real Itachi had gone around behind him.

Before Shisui, who had sensed his presence, turned around, he applied a kunai at the scruff of his neck.

«You win» Shisui muttered, frustrated.

In the end they did thirty-five fights.

The result was eleven wins for Itachi, and twenty-four wins for Shisui.

«You're not fit to be a genin anymore.» Shisui said, drinking up the water of water bottle.

«Has it been decided that you'll skip also this year's Chūnin Exam?»
«Yes.» Itachi answered, inclined his water bottle and put some fresh water in his mouth.
«You said that your jōnin in charge is Minazuki Yūki.»

Itachi nodded silently.

«He's jealous of you, isn't he? He doesn't like your talent, so he refuses to recommend you for the Chūnin Exam, right?»

«Even if he thought these things, it can't be helped.»

It was meaningless, no matter what Yūki thought and if he didn't recommend Itachi.

Even this year, Itachi couldn't take part to the Chūnin Exam. That was the reality.

«After all, you're already ten...»

«Let's quit this conversation.»

Even if they had continued, his frustration would only worsen.

«Speaking of you, how's going with that girl, Uchiha Izumi?»

Itachi stared with round eyes at Shisui, who had forcibly changed the topic.

«Though usually it's hard to understand what you're thinking about, such thing is easy to understand.»

«What do you mean?»

«Try look at your face in the mirror.»

He turned his eyes away from Shisui, who had made a mischievous smile while saying it.

«I'm thinking nothing in particular.»

«At any rate, it seems that the moment I said the name "Izumi" you became awfully sensitive.»

Sensitive...

Did he really do that?

He had no doubt that Izumi was one of his few friends. He had only that feeling, but when he was pressed again in this way by Shisui, he felt something different. But it didn't necessarily mean that he was feeling something like love.

He didn't understand well the main point himself.

«Apart from that, how are your father's conditions?»

«You avoided the discussion.» Shisui said with a grin to Itachi, who had counterattacked.

«As usual.» Shisui answered while his bright expression clouded a little.

His father had lost a leg in the previous Great War, and now he was confined to bed having caught an illness from this injury. In Shisui's family they were three: him, his father and his mother. The family finances were supported by Shisui's incomes.

«In these days he's remarkably emaciated, he doesn't even recognise me.»

«Is that so...»

«Well, human beings die sooner or later. I'm ready.»

In front of Shisui's sad determination, Itachi couldn't find any words to say.

*

«I've seen the faces of this year's Chūnin Exam, but apparently Uchiha Itachi has not entered yet.» Danzō suddenly broke out in front of Hiruzen, who was sitting in the Hokage chair.

Hiruzen, who had lowered his eyes onto the documents lined up above the desk, shifted his gaze towards Danzō as if he was looking at a strange thing.

«Come to think of it, hadn't you expressly greeted Itachi when he graduated?»

«I thought I wanted to see the face of the highest graduating student since the foundation of the Academy.»

«To think that you'd be this much attached to a member of the Uchiha clan...»

«It a loss for the village as well the fact that such promising person lets so many year pass uselessly.»

«But without a recommendation of his jōnin in charge he can't take the exam.»

In front of a frowning Hiruzen, the corners of Danzō's mouth lifted with a sharp angle.

«Minazuki Yūki, Itachi's jōnin in charge, is below the average among the jōnin. He probably envies Itachi's true strength.»

«Yūki is not that kind of ma...»

«He is that kind of man.» Danzō cut out Hiruzen's words.

«You probably don't know, but that man had been sending back to the Academy genin who's true strength was higher than his own many times so far. This time he couldn't do it, because Itachi is so excellent that his name is well-known throughout the village.»

«That *idiot*...»

«That man usually doesn't show it, but he has a dark nature at the bottom of his heart.»

He was doing an investigation though the people of the Root.

The "Root", an organization of Anbu trained under Danzō's direct control, laid out an enormous network of information inside the village. The thoughts and the philosophy, and what is the inclination of thinking of every shinobi of the village. They investigated thoroughly all these things with assiduity.

Everything for the public peace of the village.

If it's true that the Uchiha clan's Konoha Military Police Force was a structure of police that protected the village's exterior public order, the Root was the same as a secret organization that protected the public order from under the ground being concealed by the darkness of the village. In the Root, which truly inherited Danzō's ideology of protecting the peace by means of darkness, this hue was even stronger than the Anbu under the Hokage's direct control.

In other words, the Root and the Military Police Force were two sides of the same coin.

Hiruzen, who had sighed deeply, opened his serious mouth.

«If Yūki doesn't recommend him, we could make Itachi chūnin by means of a decision of the higher ups.»

«It'd be better for the village if we made him take the exam.»

«Hn?»

While he looked at Hiruzen smoking the pipe, Danzō continued.

«Chūnin Exams are a place where the headquarters of every country meet together. A chance to display each country's military strength prospects, so to speak. If we show Itachi's strength there to our heart's content, it's as strengthening the threat of our village against every village.»

«Of course Itachi is an excellent shinobi, but is his strength really that much?»

Hiruzen was seeing nothing but the outward value of the achievements of the missions. That's why he had made that judgement.

«There's no way you can understand things like one's real true strength in a mission that puts superior officers and co-workers that falls behind you together. Letting Itachi hide from the public any further is an unrecoverable loss for the village.»

«To think that you'd have a high opinion of the Uchiha clan to this point.»

«A man called Itachi is a worthy man.»

Hiruzen didn't know Danzō's true feelings. Maybe he sensed what was behind it or so, but even Hiruzen couldn't tell what in the world it was for sure.

Uchiha Itachi.

Danzō thought that no one but that man could make his dearest wish come true.

Konoha and Uchiha.

A trump card that would suppress the fate that lasted from the foundation of the village.

That was Itachi.

How would he take him under his control...

That was the problem.

*

«I'm home.»

«Welcome home brother!»

Little hands clang to Itachi's back, who was taking off his shoes.

«Did today's missions ended?»

«Yeah»

He stood up in the hallway, and caressed his four-year-old younger brother's head.

«Are you tired?»

His brother, who had reached the point of talking like a grown-up, looked like as if he was impatient to talk with his older brother. He followed straddling his brother's back, who was going through the hallway that led to the two brother's room.

“Sasuke waits the whole time for his big brother's return after you leave home.”

When he heard these things from his mother, he felt both embarrassed and happy, and extremely abashed.

«I want to go on missions, too!»

«For you, it's too early.»

As he said this, laughing, Itachi walked through the hallway.

Suddenly a paper door opened in front of his eyes.

His father's room.

«Have you returned?»

«Yes.»

His father stood in front of Itachi with a sour look, coming out of his room.

«Today, I was summoned by the Hokage-sama and we talked about you.»

«About me?»

«It has been decided that you'll take part of next year's Chūnin Exam with the recommendation of a higher-up. But next time, it has been decided that you'll participate alone, without a three-men cell. The others that will take the exam are in units of platoons. Of course you will be put in a relentless situation. But...»

His father cast his head down closing his eyes once, and after he raised his head he looked straight towards Itachi.

«I answered Hokage-sama that you'll participate.»

«T-thank you...»

Even if he wondered how much he was convinced, the days in which he kept enduring his obvious disappointment were over at last. He was wondering how many years more he had to keep being a genin with that member. He also knew that his heart, wrapped by a heavy cloud, was going to clear up.

«Without your jōnin in charge, the headquarters of the village had recommended you personally. Give your best.»

«Yes.»

«Hey dad, what did big brother do?»

Trying to join the conversation, Sasuke looked up to his father, forcing his way through the space between the two.

«You too, become a shinobi like your older brother soon.»

Placing his hands on Sasuke's sides while speaking, Fugaku lifted him up in his arms.

Sasuke's smiling face swayed in front of his father's face.

«Yeah!»

«Good kid.»

Prompted by Sasuke's pure smiling face, a smile floated also on his father's face. While looking at his younger brother, Fugaku said these words.

«The one who strongly wished for your participation to the Chūnin Exam was Shimura Danzō.»

Shimura Danzō...

Itachi remembered the gloomy face he saw the day of his graduation.

«What do you think of the Anbu?» his father's voice asked; there was a darkness that didn't match his cheerful smiling face in it.

«It's time for dinner.»

They could hear his mother's voice coming from the hallway.

«First of all, the Chūnin Exam. If even your true strength will be able to come out, you'll be able to pass without doubts. We'll talk about it after that.»

The Anbu.

We'll talk about it after that.

Leaving those ominous words behind, his father disappeared towards the dining hall in which his mother was waiting, holding his brother in his arms.

Light and darkness appeared in front of the path that led towards his future. The dazzling clearness of the two was playing with Itachi's heart, who had been left alone.

Itachi's true story: Book of Bright Light

Chapter 3 – The jet-black crow shivers for the grief of his brethren that squirm in the moonlight night

1

Things like written exams weren't a problem for Itachi.

He had seen through the purpose of the first exam of this time, that is cheating making a free use of ninjutsu without being discovered by the examiners, as soon as he started.

He was confident in his good memory.

He had been reading a lot of books in the intervals between his ninjutsu training since he was a child. Even at the time of the Academy and after he had become a genin that habit hadn't changed.

The shinobi history from the Sage of Six Paths. The alliances, the treaties, and the consolidating statutes between every country. The basic and the advanced tactics in a war and their applications. The organization of ninjutsu, the theory of kekkei genkai.

Introduction on chakra. The Tailed Beasts, the organization of ninja beasts. Basic introduction on Sage and Natural Energy. This and many other kinds of documents, books, essays.

Itachi's brain had perfectly stored all possible information.

Therefore, he didn't need to cheat.

The balance between literary and military arts.

For the ideal shinobi that Itachi had pictured, that was the most important element.

You can't display an excellent physical ability more than enough until you have a lucid mind. No matter if you have a body that excels at any kind of ninjutsu, you'll end up in failure if you can't judge accurately. And in the world of shinobi, failure leads straight to death.

His face at the moment of Tenma's death, killed by the masked man, came back to Itachi's mind.

Shaking off that disgusting vision, he let his pencil slip.

Ninety percent of his examination paper was already filled.

While the people who had been caught cheating were ordered to leave their seats one by one, Itachi, who had finished his test, observed the examinees.

Who was cheating in what way?

Without moving his face he followed the chakra in every direction.

A person who was penetrating the mind of the target group, and a person who was observing the movements of their hands. There was also a person who traced the answers with the sound of the pencil and the paper rubbing together.

Everyone was cheating with the technique that was their strongest point. Itachi distinguished calmly who used the technique of which family.

All the people in that place were rival.

If he got to know his opponents' skills in advance, he could make a good use of that situation also at the moment of the battle.

Everyone was in a group of three.

Itachi was alone.

Due to the contents of the rest of the exam, also that fact that it could happen the situation of three against one had been naturally taken into consideration. Itachi didn't have comrades. To overturn this advantageous situation, from now on also acquiring information on the enemy was a battle.

«That's enough!» the proctor in charge of the first stage shouted.

«Enough with the written test. You people who remained in this place, go to the meeting place of the second stage. The results of the first stage will be announced at the end of the second stage.»

«Yes!»

One of the other examinees raised his hand. The proctor in charge nodded, expressing his permission to speak.

«So that means that even if we pass the second stage, we aren't promoted to the third stage basing on the results of the first stage?»

«Right.»

All the examinees started making a noise at once.

«Silence.» the proctor in charge yelled.

«You are people who will become chūnin from now on. If you become chūnin, you will find yourself in the position of leading a team. In missions, having the results appearing immediately is not all. Sometimes there are cases in which you'll concentrate all your nerves on the task in front of your eyes while having just one result. This time, you have to devote all your strength. In this case, confide in your own abilities and struggle against the second stage with all your strength.»

At the jōnin's vigorous roar, the examinees remained speechless.

«Come now, the second stage.»

With the proctor in charge's words in his ears, Itachi stood up from his seat.

*

«It's not easy if you're surrounded by three people.»

In front of the boy who was talking with a smirking face, Itachi lowered his eyes to the scroll he was holding in his hand.

The people who aimed at chūnin were scattered about in the Forty-Fourth Training Ground, a place that was called with the alias "Forest of Death". In the scroll Itachi was holding in his hand, the character <Heaven> was written in a manly calligraphic style with Indian ink.

«Taking the Chūnin Exam alone, it's a suicidal act.»

The voice of a boy, different from the one before, insulted him from behind. The sneering voice of a third person, a girl, was so high pitched that it hurt his ears.

The three shinobi, who were arranged in the shape of an equilateral triangle, were surrounding Itachi.

They were wearing the forehead protector of the Village of the Hidden Mist on their foreheads.

Itachi looked towards the boy that looked like the more powerful, who was standing in front of his eyes. He was more or less fifteen, sixteen years old. Apparently he was the leader.

«If you hand over the scroll quietly, we'll leave you alone without killing you. But you understood what we'll do if you intend on put up a fight, didn't you?»

This guy owned a scroll that formed a pair with the one Itachi was holding. There must have been written «Earth» in there.

The goal of the second stage was to gather the scrolls of heaven and earth and to arrive to the tower that was at the centre of the training ground. The examinees, each one in a three-man cell, had been given just one of the scrolls, heaven or earth, and had been scattered about in the training ground. Then, they had to steal the opposite scroll from its owner that was probably somewhere. After they gathered both the heaven and earth scrolls, they had to run to the tower erected at the centre through the Forest of Death, in which all sort of various dangerous creatures, like human-eating wild animals and venomous insects, lurked.

The time limit was five days.

In other words, it was a test that required no more than that time.

The first day, Itachi incurred on the attack of an enemy all of a sudden.

They were the shinobi of Kirigakure in front of him.

Itachi, without risking any foolish move like looking for the other scroll, was heading straight to the tower. Just like he wanted the earth scroll, also the opponent wanted his heaven scroll. If he went towards the tower, he must have necessarily jumped into the opponents' way.

It went just as he had expected.

The shinobi from Kirigakure had already confirmed that Itachi possessed the heaven scroll. For that reason Itachi was walking in the middle of a way towards the tower displaying his scroll on purpose.

Those three were the ones who had fallen in his trap.

«Come on, one against three. Now calmly...»

«In the requirements of the examinees of this exam there's the entry "participation in a unit of a three-man cell".» Itachi began saying cutting off the words of the boy in front of his eyes.

«If it's so, why am I walking all alone in this way?»

«You were abandoned by your comrades or something, right?» the voice of the girl exclaimed from his left, making fun of him. The boy behind him laughed, prompted by her.

Slightly turning his face towards the girl, Itachi answered.

«I made the other two conceal in an ambush. You haven't predicted something like that?»

The girl's face, who was smiling negligently, suddenly went pale.

«Relax. I was alone from the start.»

Saying this, he turned his eyes back to the leader.

«You, who could only reach the conclusion that the situation of one against three was advantageous for your own group, are a failure both as a leader and as a chūnin.»

«Y-you're saying nothing but impertinent things and...»

«Moreover even the youth of my appearance is an ingredient of your negligence. »

«Oi, Kiruru, let's quickly kill him.»

The guy behind him yelled the name of the leader with an uneasy voice. The leader, called Kiruru, swallowed a big lump of saliva with a gulp as sweat ran through his forehead.

«Why don't you feel uncomfortable in being in this place alone? Why haven't you thought of the possibility that I had acquired the requirements of the examinees alone?

And haven't you thought about the meaning that was behind the fact that only three-man cells are examined in a standard exam?»

«Kiruru!»

It was the girl this time.

Those three began losing themselves in a strange panic.

«D-die!»

At the same moment of Kiruru's shout, which sounded like a shriek, some shuriken were fired towards Itachi from three directions. The next moment, the leader that was in front of Itachi and the boy that was behind him started running. Then the girl jumped aiming above Itachi's head.

On the ground they had decided to attack him on both sides, and if he escaped in the sky above him the girl would capture him.

“The system of the standard tactics of a three-man unit ‘Chapter one – third paragraph’.”

It was a too childish tactic.

Itachi didn't move.

The shuriken the three had fired first pierced Itachi.

Innumerable shurikens pierced his body all over.

One of the boys that now were running from both sides without leaving him an opening thrust a kunai deeply on his back.

A gush of blood surged out of Itachi's mouth.

The two guys hadn't got spare time to make sure of it. At the same time they pulled out the kunai, they moved away from Itachi taking half a step back. Immediately after that, the girl that had come down from the sky jumped on Itachi's shoulders and thrust a small knife in the crown of his head.

«We did it!» the girl shouted, delighted.

An instant.

Itachi burst open.

One by one the black fragments that had scattered in all directions turned into crows.

While their piercing cawing raised, they began poking those three's heads.

Itachi watched the too comical way in which the enemies were deceived from the top of a noticeably tall tree that was nearby. Then, after he watched for a while those three desperately trying to drive the crows away while they protected their face with both their arms, he went down and stood before them.

«Dispel!»

Together with Itachi's voice, the crows disappeared. The eyes of the three, who were standing dumbfounded without realising what had happened, spotted Itachi's figure.

«Hand over the scroll quietly. If you do it, I'll leave you at large.»

Itachi held out his hand towards the leader.

«D-don't make fun of me.» Kiruru muttered, and started forming a hand seal on his knees. Also his other two comrades, the boy and the girl who had spread at left and right, formed hand seals.

«Alright, Water Body Cooperation»

«I knew it.»

That was all Kiruru could yell.

The three of them, who had been scared out of their wits by the wall of flames that had suddenly appeared in front of their eyes, even forgot the chance to put their own technique into operation.

During the first stage, and since the second stage had began, he had continuously amassed chakra. In a moment, those three's field of vision must have been completely covered by flames.

He had fired the flames adjusting distance to hit the three at the last moment. It was no more than a threat.

It was an exam.

He didn't need to kill them, or to hurt them.

Just breaking only the opponent's spirit was enough.

The flames disappeared whirling up in the sky.

With their legs trembling in terror, those three stood up somehow. Their eyes, fixed on Itachi, were slightly blurred by tears.

He closed the distance, going towards them.

«If you still want more of it, that's fine with me. But if it's so, next time I'll have to play my trump card.»

«Eh?»

While fixing his eyes on Kiruru, who had asked him back as he burst into tears, he made chakra converge in his eyeballs.

His field of vision turned red, and the surge of the chakra that was circulating in the bodies of the three guys in front of his eyes began to be faintly visible.

«Sha-sharingan...» the boy shinobi near Kiruru muttered. A tear escaped from the strong-willed Kiruru.

«I don't know whether you've seen these eyes or not, but if you're a shinobi you must know something about these eyes.»

The girl opened and closed her sharp jaw many times. Those three, even if they were three, were completely overwhelmed by the fear of death.

«Your techniques won't affect me.»

«Fo-forgive uuuus!» Kiruru apologised throwing his forehead onto the ground. Putting his hand into his breast pocket, he looked for something. Itachi looked at him in silence for a short while, and Kiruru held out the scroll with earth written on it to him.

«It's okay as long as you understand.»

He accepted the scroll.

Itachi slightly surrounded his tiptoe with chakra.

Foot-flicker.

He quickly went behind Kiruru, and hit the scruff of his neck using his hand like a sword.

«I don't want to be attacked from behind. Sleep here for a while.»

Without looking at Kiruru who had collapsed falling prostrate with his face on the ground, he quickly went behind the boy and the girl and hit them with the back of his hand.

He had the full set of the scrolls, heaven and earth.

All that remained was only aiming at the tower at the centre of the training ground.

*

«Five hours and thirty-seven minutes of the second stage have passed. It's the shortest record so far in the stages that take place in the Forty-Fourth Training Ground.»

While listening to the strangely stiff voice of the Anbu wearing a white tiger mask, Danzō smiled.

«If we also take into consideration the formation of a team in the standard exam, this record is even more astounding.»

«The fact is that he graduated from the Academy in one year. In that guy's case, it's not particularly strange.»

With a sidelong glance to the tiger mask, who had nodded, Danzō stood up from the chair.

«It's time for the third stage to begin. Any time now I'll have to go.»

«There's a report about this.»

The man stopped Danzō, who was about to walk and had taken a step forward.

«What is it?»

«The genin of our village that had to fight him in the first round forfeited the match.»

«Did they fear Itachi's power?»

«Naturally.»

Danzō made a wide smile looking up to the ceiling.

The white tiger waited for the words of his master.

«How much better it would be if that guy wasn't an Uchiha, I thought it many times. But I've never realised it so much.»

«There's a purpose for the use of the Uchiha in the Uchiha.»

«I've already realised it without being told by the likes of you.» he answered, and started walking.

«Who's the opponent of the second round?»

«If the first round had gone in the proper way, I guess Nemui, a genin of the Village of the Hidden Mist, should have gone...»

«What a ridiculous name.»

«That boy, who's nicknamed "Nemui Sound Asleep", became popular among the youth of Kirigakure and is an average ninja.»

Humph, he laughed with his nose.

«A shinobi who's given two names is second-rate after all. A true shinobi doesn't need two names.»

«Yes» the man nodded while walking next to him.

«How will Uchiha Itachi, who doesn't have two names, deal with a genin that has a foolish name like "Sound Asleep"? It will be fun from now on.»

While being surprised within himself for having used that excited voice after many years, Danzō calmly walked through the way towards the stadium.

*

«I repeat it, but the rules are completely useless. The match lasts until one of the two admits his defeat. But when I decide that it's impossible to continue, I'll end the match there. Is it clear with you two.»

The sleepy-looking face in front of his eyes listened silently to the authoritative proctor in charge that was informing them. He had yawned so many times now that he wondered if he wasn't to fall asleep in this place soon.

The boy's name was Nemui.

Apparently he was a Kirigakure shinobi.

«Isn't it better to put your turn later, and have a good sleep?» Itachi asked gently towards Nemui. Keeping half of the curtain of his eyelids lowered above his perfectly circular eyes, Nemui, who had a flat mouth, stared at Itachi's face.

«Don't worry about it.»

Even his smiling face, that grinned saying this, looked sleepy.

The circular battleground had walls that curved towards the inside, and part of the ceiling that closed in a circle. The ground was covered by earth, and some trees had been planted here and there. The expanded wooden stages were lined up sticking out from the upper part of the walls, and many spectators were watching the fight in which the future of the genin was at stake.

The daimyō of each country with the people that were in ruling classes, chūnin in the upper reaches of the hidden villages from the shinobi world, all the jōnin. On top of that even members of the underworld that had sneaked in disguising themselves managed to be present there.

Which hidden village ever was standing there in front of the world of shinobi of the future?

Everyone was watching the fights of young shinobi, holding their breath.

This place, in which skilled genin from every village fought risking their lives, was a miniature copy of a war, so to speak. The battles that were carried out in this place sometimes were likely to lead to the power relationships of every village several years later.

For this reason.

Itachi had to display his absolute power here.

Uchiha Itachi was in the Village of the Hidden Leaf...

He would display his overwhelming power to the point that the adults that had met in this place would think that only in Konoha they mustn't start a fight. That had to become a step that led towards a world without conflicts.

He had no intention to ease up at all.

He'd go with his full power.

«Second round, third match. Uchiha Itachi, genin of Konohagakure, versus Nemui, genin of Kirigakure. Begin!» the proctor yelled.

«Yaaawn...»

At the signal of start, Nemui made a big yawn.

A laugh rose like a whisper from the stadium.

Itachi assumed a stance. Bending one leg in front and extending the other behind slightly, he evenly opened his legs. No weapons were clutched in his hands. Drawing out the strength of his whole body, he made his senses wander without converging them in one point. No matter what kind of movement the opponent made, it was a stance that would deal with them instantaneously.

«Since I'm sleepy...»

Nemui's standing body, who hadn't assumed a stance worthy of the name "stance", began swinging, slowly swaying from side to side.

«Do you mind if I sleep~»

Before hearing Itachi's answer, Nemui closed his eyes. His body, which was rigid just like a stiff pole dropped on the ground, collapsed onto the ground while pitching forward. Just before he did it, Nemui disappeared from his field of vision.

«!»

Itachi's breath was taken away.

There had been no hint of movement at all.

Also his behaviour had been too sudden.

It hadn't been visible even if he moved at right or left.

He had predicted his movements slightly late.

The space of that instant made Itachi forestall.

He could hear a snore from behind.

A thunder...

Nemui's right arm, who was swinging as he slept, slightly grazed Itachi's face, who had jumped ahead at once as if he did a forward somersault. In his arm, which ran past him from behind with a terrific energy, a white electric light coiled about, becoming innumerable thunders. As he optimistically wondered if that was the thunder's natural shape, Itachi landed while adjusting the distance between him and Nemui.

Nemui was still fast asleep.

And still standing up.

Was he acting? Or was he really sleeping?

He had no choice but try to inflict him a direct attack to find out.

He fetched a kunai from his pouch and threw it.

It flew in straight line towards Nemui's face, who sleeping.

His body, which was swaying from side to side, swung widely, and avoided the kunai at the last moment.

Had he waken up?

Anyhow he had his eyes closed so the Sharingan wouldn't be useful.

Nemui was sleeping standing bolt upright as if the attack of just now hadn't happened.

When he thought that his body had shook violently once, it disappeared once again from his field of vision.

Itachi revolved in the sky above him faster than it could be followed with bare eyes.

Nemui's arm, clad with thunder, cut off the place in which he was standing just a moment ago.

He landed close to the wall, adjusting the distance between them, and caught the enemy on his field of vision again.

Bewildering thoughts were circling around inside his head. He tried to analyse somehow the phenomenon that had happened before his eyes.

It was impossible to use the Sharingan, which consumed a great amount of chakra. In the formula for an overwhelming victory, the Sharingan was indispensable. He needed to keep it in reserve until then.

He had the self-confidence to analyse the phenomenon before his eyes from the experiences of his ten years of life he lived so far.

It wasn't important enough for him to rely on the power of the Sharingan.

Think...

He speculated looking at Nemui, who was swinging his body far away.

He hypothesised that by means of a mental state of selflessness such as sleep, the enemy was using a kind of technique that drew out his body's physical strength to its utmost limits. By sleeping he suppressed his own self, in order to do movements specialised only in pure instinct and animal intuition.

He had been surprised by his sleeping state, and had lost his composure so he had lost his focus, but this was a match in which he needed physical strength. If only he could hone his physical strength, it wouldn't be difficult for him to stand on an equal ground with the opponent.

He concentrated all his nerves on the enemy before his eyes.

Nemui, who was swaying, was quivering with a twitch.

He went.

His eyesight, his hearing, his olfaction, the sense of touch of his whole body.

He felt Nemui with all these things.

Itachi perceived a presence getting near him following the wall at his right.

A flash of lightning.

He avoided it.

It's all right...

Itachi still outrivaled him in physical strength.

If he understood this he could deal with it.

He dodged Nemui's attack, who was released from his mental state of selflessness, with a fluent movement.

This time he had discerned his mentality.

Why the enemy's strong point was a technique that relied on sleeping?

While he was asleep, the enemy imagined what he was thinking.

It was highly probable that while he enhanced his physical strength blocking his own self, he didn't have memory of himself. If that was true, it meant that Nemui didn't remember that he was in the middle of a battle.

If he woke up, his opponent would be defeated...

Why did he need such jutsu?

Because he was a coward.

He was extremely afraid of hurting and being hurt. That's why he escaped into sleep.

If Nemui was a coward, a sleep in which he'd never wake up was frightening.

He would necessarily open his eyes to check the situation.

The match would be settled in that moment.

Nemui attacked, and the battle in which Itachi avoided him perfectly lasted for about ten minutes. When the people in the stadium began murmuring for the development that lacked movements, it happened.

Suddenly Nemui stopped and trembled slightly, and his closed eyelids opened a little.

Their eyes met.

He was waiting for this moment.

He pumped chakra in his pupils.

The Sharingan.

It became operative in a hundredth of a second.

That instant, Itachi risked.

While he kept dodging the attacks he cast the mental image he had drawn in details inside his mind aiming at Nemui's pupils.

«No!» Nemui shrieked.

Nemui, who had woken up just that instant, went back to sleep.

He made it...

Drawing near him from behind, unnoticed, he cut off the back of Nemui's neck with a kunai.

Nemui would have died with his throat sliced. But having the self-consciousness of being still alive, he closed his eyes again.

However he couldn't sleep completely like he used to anymore.

He dodged Nemui's attack for several minutes, and his eyelids moved again.

In the space of an instant, Itachi's field of vision turned crimson.

The image of this time was a thing that hollowed out his stomach.

It repeated itself over and over again.

Every time he was killed, Nemui's sleep became more superficial.

Stabbed to death, strangled, beaten to death, poisoned.

Nemui kept dying in every possible way.

Finally Nemui couldn't sleep anymore.

If he had slept, he'd be killed by Itachi again.

He was completely controlled by the fear of death that repeated itself many times over.

«No... no... no...»

While he moved his shoulders up and down, hyperventilating, Nemui trembled all over.

The spectators of the stadium didn't even understand what was happening. The people who understood that Itachi had used the Sharingan were several in the whole stadium at best.

As Itachi kept dodging the attacks, Nemui's movements were becoming gradually sluggish, cold sweat began beading his face, and he started crying.

Itachi never attacked him physically.

«H-help...» Nemui muttered, begging.

When he fell prostrate on the ground on his knees, he began weeping out loud.

«Anymore... I don't wanna die anymore. I beg you, help me... please.»

«It's over!»

The inspector forced his way through them.

The stadium fell silent.

Apparently everybody was confused for that overly impossible-to-understand situation.

Nemui screamed in a half-crazy way until his figure disappeared as the proctor carried him away. The words "I don't wanna die" that he kept emitting continuously froze even the corners of the stadium.

Nemui would probably quit being a shinobi.

He had filled him with that much fear.

Shinobi were the main cause of the wars of this world.

If it turned out that one wasn't a shinobi, the cause of the war would decrease that much.

There was no doubt that he had completely broke Nemui's mind.

Even the atmosphere of this place was no exception.

Itachi alone had given birth to the presence of death that was in the air in the whole stadium. In front of his impossible to understand power, probably the shinobi of every country had realised the bottomless power of that boy called Itachi.

They shouldn't turn this boy into their enemy...

The more people thought so, the more the possibility that Konoha would be dragged into a war decreased.

A genjutsu by means of the Sharingan was an effective means only against the opponents, to blend their vision. But if he used it effectively, he could put an unspecified number of people under that genjutsu called suggestion.

To get rid of all the conflicts from this world...

Itachi was thankful from the bottom of his heart to the Konoha's higher-ups who had approved his participation to the Chūnin Exams. Itachi turned around and walked towards the place in which the proctor in charge of Nemui had gone.

In the silence, he heard someone clapping.

He lifted his head and looked in direction of the sound.

A face half concealed by bandages...

«Shimura Danzō...»

On Danzō's lips, who was looking down on Itachi who had muttered his name, a dark distorted smile was clinging.

2

«Now, my son has become a chūnin.» Fugaku said plainly in front of his fellow clansmen that were sitting in a row. His son, who was wearing a Konoha jacket, was standing next to him in a cool attire.

«Congratulations.»

The one who spoke was Yashiro. He smiled, narrowing his narrow eyes more than usual. Taking advantage of the words of his trusted friend, all his fellow clansmen said words of congratulations at once.

«Say few words of reply yourself.»

«Yes.» his son answered with a voice that didn't express any emotion at all.

«From now on, I'm ready to devote myself to my ninja way throwing myself away for the sake of Konoha, and the clan. I'll be counting on you, thanks.»

With this firm reply, which didn't sound like a ten-year-old boy's, Itachi bowed his head towards his fellow clansmen.

In the first stage he had scored the second best record after Namikaze Minato, and in the second stage he had clearly shortened drastically the shortest time hitherto despite he had participated alone.

In the first stage, he won the first round without fighting for his opponent's default. After the battle of the second round, he ended his exam because of the decision of the higher-ups that he needn't to take part to the third round.

Itachi was publicly promoted to chūnin.

Despite he was his child, he was a ninja who had been blessed with a talent that should be feared. Fugaku sometimes even had a feeling of envy towards the genius Itachi had been blessed with, forgetting about the fact that he was his son.

«If a genius shinobi like Itachi entered in the Military Police Force, maybe also the situation of the Uchiha in the village would improve.» the long-haired Inabi said joyfully. Fugaku gave voice to his mind while looking down on his shiny dark hairs.

«I have no intention of letting Itachi into the Military Police Force.»

All the people present became agitated.

Itachi stared silently at the void without even showing surprise.

He hadn't acknowledged his son?

A feeling of distrust sprang out, but it was also impossible to press him for an explanation in front of everyone. While changing his mind, Fugaku threw these words to his fellow clansmen.

«I think I want to let my son into the Anbu.»

«The Anbu... really?»

Yashiro used a voice from which a hint of animosity oozed out.

Fugaku nodded silently and changed his answer.

«We Military Police Force and the Anbu, it's a relationship that entered in conflicts on countless occasions concerning Konoha's public order.»

«I know this thing better than anyone else.»

He cut off Yashiro's reproaching words.

Konoha's Military Police Force, with the Uchiha clan as the main constituent, had been established for the maintenance of the Village of the Hidden Leaf's public order. Even now, with Fugaku serving as the captain, the Military Police Force kept working day and night for the Village of the Hidden Leaf's sake.

The Military Police Force was the Village of the Hidden Leaf's police organization, so to speak.

But there was another force for the maintenance of the public order in the village.

It was the Anbu.

The Anbu, which was the force under the Hokage's direct control composed by skilled shinobi, showed their faces almost always in the important missions outside and inside the village.

It had been decided that the serious crimes that occurred in the village were snatched from the Military Police Force's hands and entrusted to the Anbu.

There wasn't a clear delineation of up to which point it was Military Police Force's category and from where it became the Anbu's object of investigation. The actual condition was that sequential forms of the investigation varied depending on the Hokage's decision from time to time.

For this reason between the Military Police Force and the Anbu collisions happened repeatedly. Being at the lead of the Military Police Force, Fugaku always negotiated with the Hokage and the Anbu. Fugaku was surely the one who knew the discord between the Military Police Force and the Anbu better.

The inner sanctuary of the Naka shrine was wrapped in an uproarious atmosphere.

People who criticised the Anbu, people who tried to guess Fugaku's true intentions, people who spoke of Konoha's poor treatment towards the Uchiha.

The resentment that everyone was bearing erupted all at once.

«Listen!» he roared to his fellow clansmen.

A killing intent without a fixed direction filled the inner sanctuary, which fell silent.

Choosing his words, Fugaku began talking slowly.

«I understand everyone's feeling. I have the same feeling, too. That's exactly why I'll let Itachi into the Anbu. I intent on making my son a mediator between the village and the clan.»

Everyone had their breath taken away.

«The people of the Anbu's Root are secretly watch-keeping out district, as we all know.

In this case, we'll have some eyes guarding the village, too.»

«That'll be Itachi, right?»

Yashiro nodded at the question.

The fellow clansmen stirred.

«Even though we're comrades from the same village...» a whispering voice could be heard.

This voice, which was emitted aiming at the sudden silence, arrived to the ears of everyone in the room.

The owner of the voice was standing next to him.

Itachi, who had cast his eyes down when he met everyone's gaze, remained silent with a lonesome-looking expression.

«What did you say just now?» Yashiro asked.

With his eyes still lowered, Itachi spoke with a rigid voice, without seeming to refer to anyone.

«It doesn't change the fact that we are all compatriots, even the Senju clan and everybody in the village... It'd be better if we stop this behaviour that will create and unusual distance stir up a rivalry.»

The killing intent that wrapped the place became stronger.

Apparently Itachi noticed it. However, even so he kept throwing up his words, unconcerned.

«They did it, so we'll do it too. An opponent kills, so we'll take revenge. That's how wars are created.»

«You're on Konoha's side?»

«You interpret everything with the perspective of a supporter of just one side, so you can't see the general situation.»

«You bastard!»

Yashiro, enraged, stood up trying to catch the nape of Itachi's neck. Fugaku stopped his trusted friend's arm.

«Captain» Yashiro yelled, letting out his wrath.

«Calm down.»

«But!»

«Calm down and listen.»

Yashiro sat, sighing ostentatiously. Without being perturbed at all, Itachi simply cast his eyes down, still silent.

«Apologise, Itachi.»

Everyone turned their angry looks towards a silent Itachi.

«I know what you want to say. But reality is different from ideals. What you're saying are ideals to the bitter end. Of course conflicts and wars cause chains of hatred. However, you, a child, don't know things like the true troubles of the oppressed. If you remembered in how much painful situation the Uchiha clan has been cornered since the foundation of the village, you won't be able to use such rash words.»

«I'm a member of the Uchiha clan, too. I think I know the troubles of the clan.»

«Then apologise!» Yashiro yelled.

Itachi's eyes, who made a lonesome expression, were slowly pointed towards Yashiro.

«I'm sorry.» Itachi said in a fading voice.

Fugaku heard distinctly the scream that his son's heart had let out. He understood Itachi's feeling of wanting to avoid conflicts so much it hurt. But he also understood the discontent that his fellow clansmen were feeling in the same way. No, Fugaku himself, in

the life he had lived so far as a Konoha shinobi, had had bitter experiences on countless occasions.

He had been excluded from the centre of the village just because he was an Uchiha. Even the dreams he had in his youth had been cruelly crushed with the sole pretext that he came from Uchiha clan.

Hokage...

An empty illusion that could never come true again.

«We'll talk about this properly at home.» Fugaku said in a voice that only his son could hear.

There was no response.

*

«Itachi-senpai!»

Being called by a high-pitched voice that pierced his ears, Itachi looked back.

The evening traffic of the Village of the Hidden Leaf was overflowing with people. He was coming back from Hokage residence, which he had gone to for the formalities of his chūnin promotion.

The person that was standing in front of his eyes was a girl he recognised. She was older than Itachi.

She was the girl that was his comrade until half month ago.

«I'm Himuka. Suzukaze Himuka.»

She repeated her name as if she had seen through Itachi's mind, who was perplexed.

Itachi had come to know her surname, Suzukaze, only in that moment for the first time.

«Congratulation for your promotion at chūnin.»

«Thank you.»

Himuka was older than him. But as a shinobi, Itachi was her superior. That complex situation made him hesitate on what words he should use. Was it better to use honorifics, or was it better to talk normally? After thinking it over, he went with "Thank you".

Without even noticing Itachi's hesitation, Himuka looked at him while making her eyes sparkle.

«I look up to you, senpai, you got amazing grades even in the Chūnin Exams! Having been able to work in the same team by your side, even if for a short time, is my pride!»

It wasn't that he fought to be praised and make someone proud.

He didn't know what he should reply.

«Are you still working with that taciturn comrade?»

«Yōji-san.»

That was his name.

«More or less at the same time it had been decided that you'd take the Chūnin Exams, Itachi-senpai, also Yōji-san had changed his assignment somehow, and I haven't met him since then.»

«He changed his assignment?»

«It was a sudden story, we didn't even say goodbye.»

For some reason he felt uncomfortable.

What kind of thing was it a change of assignment so sudden that he couldn't even say goodbye?

He could think only one thing.

The Anbu.

But it hadn't been long since Yōji had become a genin. He didn't even remember if he had done any outstanding work while he carried out missions with him.

«Now I'm doing my best with two new comrades and Yūki-sensei!»

While he stared at Himuka, who was talking in a fresh tone of voice, Itachi etched the boy's name, Yōji, into a corner of his mind.

3

«Recently, when you occasionally come to my place, in the end all you talk about is Uchiha Itachi.»

Danzō stared motionlessly at Hiruzen's figure, who said this while sitting on the Hokage chair smoking tobacco.

One he had warned him that a shinobi that smokes things like tobacco made his body permeated with its odour. That time, Hiruzen had smiled and answered that a Hokage doesn't go in infiltration missions so it was okay.

Not that what Danzō said wasn't true.

He had advocated the problem of readiness.

Whether he was Hokage or a genin, a shinobi mustn't forget that any time is the time for fighting. Should the circumstance arise in which he hadn't to be followed by an enemy, the scent of tobacco that Hiruzen let follow around his body would be a sign of his presence for the opponent.

Things like absoluteness didn't exist in this world.

Without even knowing these ideas of Danzō's, Hiruzen picked some new tobacco from its case placed nearby, throwing the ashes that had burnt out on the tray above the desk, and lighted a fire onto the head of the pipe. The violet smoke dissolved on the current that came from the window left open, and stung Danzō's nose. Even though he winced for the unpleasant smell, he didn't show it on his expression.

He has been "acquainted" with Hiruzen since they were genin.

Danzō never used the word "friend". A friend was the product of a feeling of cosiness between people of the same status. The despicable thought of depending on a partner made people use the word "friend". Danzō had never thought whether if he wanted to depend on people, or if he wanted people to be dependent on him. That's why he had never used such a naive word like friend.

While exhaling the smoke of tobacco, Hiruzen shifted his eyes towards Danzō.

«As you said, it's been five months since he was promoted to chūnin. Itachi has been carrying out his missions more than flawlessly. He understands every field of expertise, even the missions that requires genin, and he gives precise instructions unlike an eleven-year-old boy. Also the written reports he does are faithful to the format and in a careful order.»

«As I thought, his two years as a genin have been a loss both for Itachi and for the village.»

«You should think that also that was an indispensable experience.»

That man called Hiruzen always saw everything in a positive light. As a result, he probably earned the popularity of the shinobi who were in a place hit by sunlight. But the true nature of the shinobi was that they were people lurking in the darkness. Danzō always thought that creating organizations like the Anbu in the village and establishing a distinction between the darkness and the light in itself was humorous.

«Come to think of it...»

Dropping the ashes of the pipe on the tray, Hiruzen paused. Then he stretched a little on the chair.

«Recently, maybe because of my age, the long hours of deskwork worn me out.»

«That's your duty.»

«Not even few words of sympathy?»

«Tell me what you've started to tell me before.»

At Danzō's undisputable objection, Hiruzen opened his mouth, snorting slightly.

«There has been an interesting proposal from Uchiha Fugaku.»

Fugaku...

The Military Police Force captain's sour look materialised on Danzō's mind.

«He was sounding me out on Itachi's admission in the Anbu.»

The instant he heard Hiruzen's statement, his heart had a jump of joy. Danzō wasn't stupid to the point of letting it out on his face. Answering only the few words "Is that so", he waited for Hiruzen's words.

«Fugaku was saying that Itachi's skills probably wouldn't be able to express themselves as much as he liked in the Military Police Force. It wasn't because he was his own son, even if he looked at him objectively Itachi has an exceptional talent as a shinobi. He said that leading him in a place in which he could freely express his genius was a parent's duty, and he sounded me out about his admission in the Anbu.»

Hiruzen sent an examining glance at Danzō's countenance, letting the darkness dwell inside his eyes.

The discussion hadn't ended there. He'd express his opinion after Hiruzen told him everything.

«Homura and Koharu are strongly against. They say that letting an Uchiha into the Anbu, that are a special unit under the direct control of the Hokage, is outrageous. That I forgot the purpose for which the Second founded the Military Police Force.»

«The Military Police Force served for keeping the Uchiha clan away from the centre of the village.»

«Yeah...»

Hiruzen, who had sighed, tried to stuff tobacco in his pipe for the third time.

«You'd better stop that, at least during an important discussion.»

Just like a child scolded by his father, Hiruzen, after shrugging a little in disagreement, deposited his pipe on the desk.

«In the end, even if I it's okay, they'll end up opposing bringing forth even your name, what would you, who have a pure hate for the Uchiha, say.»

Homura and Koharu were Konoha's Honourable Counsellors.

Even they were "acquaintances" from when he was a child.

They were only old people who had a long life only out of luck, because they hadn't any particular talent and they didn't stood out in the most severe epoch in which a lot of their comrades had died during the furious Great War. The only thing they were good at was receiving the honorary position of Honourable Counsellors with many thanks.

Unless they borrowed the strength of a voiceful person having sufficient authority, they couldn't even persist in their own opinions.

«As I thought, you too...»

«You should let him in, why not?»

He probably had thought that Danzō would naturally oppose. Slightly opening his eyes wide, the hint of a suspicion floated on Hiruzen's pupils.

He had no intention of opposing.

Fugaku's proposal was a lifesaver instead.

Danzō wished to let Itachi join the Anbu from the beginning.

He would have used any means.

For Danzō's ambitions, that being called Uchiha Itachi was indispensable. In fact, he had feared that Fugaku would have suspected him and stiffened his attitude if he had recommended him in the Anbu himself. The fact that he had gone sounding that man out was nothing but luck.

«I thought that even you, who like Itachi, would show your disapproval for the story of his admission in the Anbu though.»

Hiruzen didn't even try to conceal the investigating expression of his eyes. Reacting calmly at that, Danzō answered.

«Itachi is a shinobi that appears once in a century. You shouldn't let a profitable pawn for the village stay unused, even if he's in the Uchiha clan.»

«An answer typical of you.»

The Third Hokage nodded deeply in assent.

«If it means that you accept, even I have no complaint on Itachi's admission in the Anbu. To resolve the rivalry between the village and the Uchiha, first of all we have to dissolve the heart of the young people. Dragging Itachi into the heart of the village may become a good chance for this.»

He had no intention of agreeing with Hiruzen's optimistic thinking. But the fact that the Hokage approved Itachi's admission in the Anbu, whatever the reason, was welcomed by Danzō.

«However, Itachi is still eleven. The only thing needed is to convince them of his admission in the Anbu.»

«It's a mission for entering in the Anbu.»

«Right.»

«Why don't you leave that to me?»

*

Peace...

Itachi calmly looked at himself wandering aimlessly as he relaxed himself.

Izumi's figure was walking while laughing next to him.

Five month had passed since he became chūnin.

Worrying for Itachi, that didn't take a day off worth of that name, the village had ordered him a long-term (that is, a week long) holiday. They had practically told him to rest even against his own will.

His father, who had heard that, had nodded saying that it was a good time, and said that in that holiday he had to rest even from his training with Shisui.

Itachi, who didn't know any other way to spend time except missions and training so far, couldn't do anything for this feeling, as if he had been suddenly abandoned in calm ocean. Even if he thought of sleeping all day long, his body, which was used to missions, woke up before the daybreak cry of the crows. Since he couldn't help it he had no choice but kill his time playing with Sasuke, who had turned six, and keeping him company in his training before he entered the Academy.

Sasuke had really grown big...

Just until yesterday he spoke in a baby talk while crawling on all fours, but now he spoke perfectly like a grown up. He talked of this and that with him while following him around saying insistently "big brother, big brother".

He couldn't help but being happy of being able to receive attentions from his older brother, who usually wasn't home.

Doing this for about three days, his father told him to go out and talk with a person his age while he looked after Sasuke.

"You're exhausted. Go enjoy your occasional peace as much as you can. In that case we won't talk about that thing."

That thing...

It was that matter at the Naka shrine.

Even now Itachi regretted of having said his real intention and having been disconcerted by his fellow clansmen that repeated nothing but words of hate for the village. No matter what he said to those people carried away by rage, they wouldn't understand him. Words alone were useless.

However, that time the words he said were his true feelings. And they weren't a lie, either. The more they hated their opponent, the more the opponent would hate them in turn. Then a war would break out. He understood his clan's distress, but what was the use of bearing a grudge?

Then his father had smashed Itachi's feelings just with the word "Apologise".

«Hey, are you listening?»

The high-pitched voice resounded inside his head, breaking the attention of his meditation.

After blinking for an instant, Itachi looked in direction of the voice.

Izumi was walking next to him in a hopping way of walking. Her eyes seized Itachi and didn't let him go.

«It's dangerous if you don't look ahead of where you're walking.»

«Yeah.»

Even the voice that answered him was hopping.

«Why don't we rest a little over there?» Izumi said, and pointed at a tea house in front of them.

There were in the heart of the village, out of the clan's district. Itachi wasn't afraid of things like what would have happened if they questioned him about walking alone with another person.

He was going out for a walk with a friend.

Nothing else.

«Excuse me, we're two.» Izumi said, and sat on a bench in front of the shop in which a scarlet carpet was laid out.

Also Itachi sat next to her.

«Yees»

He heard a familiar voice coming from inside the shop.

«Aah! Itachi-kun, isn't it!»

That voice with that broad accent belonged to his former comrade.

«Shinko»

«Long time no see~»

Shinko was with him in Team Two in which he had been assigned when he was a genin. He knew that she had come to understand the reality of the shinobi in the mission in which Tenma had died, and she had gave up her position of genin.

«I work here.»

«So it seems.»

Izumi watched Itachi talking intimately with Shinko, who was older than them, getting jittery on her chair.

«What? A girl?» Shinko, who had put two glasses of tea on the bench, asked while her eyes lightened up.

«She's a friend.»

«Ah! Now this girl is disappointed.»

At Shinko's mocking words, Izumi had a start of surprise. Then Shinko, who smiled looking at Izumi's figure, turned her eyes towards Itachi.

«I heard you became a chūnin. Congratulations.»

«Thank you.»

Since Shinko's words of some time ago, Izumi had become quiet, covering her face.

«Of course I'm glad I quit being a shinobi.»

Shinko clutched the tray in which she had hold the tea to her chest.

«That was also the fact that Tenma died. Though, part of the reason why I quitted being a shinobi was also you.»

«Me?»

«If I looked at it next to a genius like you, I could see the limit of my own talent to the point of hating it. Having done so, I had become somehow sad, and even if I had continued being a shinobi I don't thing it would have been a good thing. And so the next day I quitted being a shinobi.»

Shinko laughed with a loud delightful voice. Then they could hear a voice calling the girl coming from inside the shop.

«Well then, take your time. I'll come again once you've decided your order.» Shinko said, and disappeared inside the shop.

«As I thought, you're amazing Itachi-kun...»

After making sure that Shinko wasn't there anymore, Izumi muttered with her eyes still down.

«I haven't a talent like yours, so much that it cuts off someone's ninja path.»

«But this year you graduated from school, right?»

She had graduated one year earlier, since she was eleven. It wasn't that she had no talent.

«That's hardly a talent.»

While looking at Izumi, who said it with a desolate look, Itachi felt a faint gratification.

Part of the reason why Shinko had quitted being a shinobi was himself...

That meant that Itachi's power made a shinobi disappear from the world.

If the shinobi had decreased by one, the conflicts had decreased by one.

Shinko's confession, even if a little, had proved that the path he was going ahead of wasn't wrong.

«There's a thing I want to ask you.»

Tears were slightly blurring Izumi's eyes, who had lifted her face and was looking at Itachi.

«Why are you a shinobi?»

«Eh»

«If being a shinobi you go out in an actual fighting, it'll turn out that you'll experience painful feelings many times. There's no need for a girl like you to experience such feelings.»

«Because my father was a shinobi...»

«You're a shinobi for this reason only?»

«It's not only that.»

Izumi answered, as if to assert it. In her black eyes below her long eyelashes, he caught a glimpse of wrath. Itachi didn't understand the meaning of that.

«I wanted to walk the same path with a person I like... Is that a crime to think something like that?»

As she said this, Izumi got up.

«Good-bye.»

She turned back, and from her eyes that once smiled a teardrop spilled over and dropped. With her back still pointed towards Itachi, Izumi didn't look back again.

«What? Did you make her cry?»

Shinko, who was standing behind him without him noticing, said mocking him.

«If you can kill the mood that much, you could become a shinobi again, right?»

«Absolutely not!»

4

«I've already heard it from Fugaku.»

Itachi listened expressionless to the words Danzō said while casting his damp eyes away. He was in the living room where he commanded a branch of the organization separated from the Anbu under the Hokage's direct control.

The Root...

That was the name of the branch Danzō led. Their members were expected to be Anbu. But they were different from the Anbu under the Hokage's direct control for their system of orders.

This branch, called Root, was an elite group that collected especially gifted people from childhood among the village, was hidden in the darkness of the village and loyally carried out the maintenance of public order and unofficial tasks.

Itachi himself came to know about it after he had been ordered by Danzō to come into this room. The majority of the people in the village didn't even know that a branch called Root existed. The people of the village recognised that Danzō had been Hiruzen's right-hand man since early childhood, and that his public role was similar to an executive officer that managed the Anbu.

In the most internal part of the residence, there was Danzō's room. It was on the cliff that was the Hokage Mountain, in which the faces of the successive generations of the Hokage were carved, which was located at the north of the village. On the surface, this residence, located at the base of this mountain, was considered a vault of the documents and the official papers related to the missions. Usually it was a place that no one approached.

Also the back gate of the village through which the Anbu passed when they went on missions was near here.

It was a gloomy place that the sunlight didn't touch even at noon. There was a room in the depths of the estate that had been built there. Even though it was afternoon, huge candles had been lit at the four corners of the room.

Danzō's face, which floated among the swaying flames, gave off a charming, ghostly atmosphere just like a statue of Buddha staring into the dark night. If he had been a cowardly person, he'd probably have crouched shedding tears just for being in that place. «I can safely think that you too agreed on entering the Anbu.»

«Yes.»

The corners of Danzō's mouth, who heard the concise answer, lifted slightly. His eyes, narrow as a line, were fixed on Itachi. Danzō's eyes, who tried not to miss even a faint flicker of one of his hair, not even one of his breaths, was so sharp that it filled him with trepidation. Itachi completely felt like in an illusion in which he was fighting against an enemy.

«There was reluctance from the higher-ups in relation to the entrance in the Anbu of the Uchiha clan.»

A gloomy darkness coiled around Itachi even here.

The grudge of his father and the others in the clan's meetings.

And the prejudices and the discrimination of the shinobi of the village towards the Uchiha.

As long as he was in the village, darkness would follow him around.

For this reason...

He was an Anbu.

It wasn't for his father's order.

It was a will of Itachi himself.

The Anbu was an elite group that only the shinobi chosen among the village were allowed to belong to. If he distinguished himself here, even building a firm position in the heart of the village wouldn't be a dream.

To change the reality of this village, he had no choice but become great.

If he became the Hokage, he would change everything.

The first Hokage from the Uchiha clan...

The journey to erase the conflicts of this world in which Itachi walked was beginning to find a definite guide little by little.

First of all he'd join the Anbu. Then he'd distinguish himself, and acquire a social position in the heart of the village. After that, there was the Hokage. By becoming Hokage he'd erase the village's discrimination towards the Uchiha.

Itachi's dream didn't end there.

If he became the Hokage, he could frequently have meetings with influential people from the other villages. If he cooperated with the shinobi of the other villages, the rivalry among shinobi would have to disappear.

The shinobi would disappear from this world.

If the shinobi disappeared, the daimyō would lose their means to make wars.

The one in front of him was a world without wars or conflicts.

For Itachi's dream, Anbu and Hokage were no more than points of passage.

First of all, the first step.

Entering the Anbu.

He had no time to waste for caring about things like the antipathy of the higher-ups of the village and the people of the Anbu. He intended on demolish all the oppositions.

«You need an “achievement” that will indicate whether if you’re a man suitable for the Anbu or not.»

«Do you mean, a mission?»

«Exactly.»

Just like a puppet, Danzō didn’t make the slightest movement.

Also Itachi hadn’t moved even one finger.

He had the feeling that if it looked like that his body trembled, even just a little, he would see through his feelings from there.

The two of them unfolded their secret feuds.

«It has been decided that I’ll be in charge of the mission assigned to you.»

The fact that Danzō would look after him meant that it was gloomy mission in which the light of the sun wouldn’t get through...

He was already prepared for this.

Itachi kept staring at Danzō in his eyes, which concealed his strong will.

«There’s a certain man in the Anbu.»

He had entered into the main question.

«He’s thirty-four. From your point of view he’s probably already old as a shinobi.»

Maybe with a sarcastic intent, or a joking intent, Danzō said it with a monotonous voice.

Itachi didn’t intend to reply.

After he had sunk into silence for a short while, Danzō began speaking again.

«He’s not like you, but also this man has been deemed as a genius from childhood, has climbed the stairs of genin and chūnin well, and he entered the Anbu as soon as he was promoted to jōnin. But...»

The moment he interrupted his speech, all the lights at the four corners swayed.

«The truth that he has been in a secret understanding with the Village of the Hidden Mist had been recently discovered.»

A traitor...

The general outline of his mission was appearing.

«The people who know about this man’s betrayal are very few among the village.»

«Getting rid of this man is my...»

«Listen until the end.» that cold voice ordered to Itachi.

«It has been decided that the people who belong to the Anbu try not to let the people of the village know they’re members as much as possible. Also that man leads an ordinary life as a jōnin on the surface. He has a wife, and two children of three and one.»

What did Danzō want to plant in him?

Itachi asked within his mind.

What was he trying to do by telling him that the man he’d try to kill from now on had a family? If there was the suspicion that he’d hesitate to execute the mission, carried away by compassion, behind the words of just now, that was a big mistake.

«If it weren’t for the connection with the Village of the Hidden Mist, that man would be a skilled, kind and splendid shinobi also with the Hokage’s trust.»

When the words “splendid shinobi” were spat out of Danzō’s mouth, they sounded too dramatic and there was no truth in them. After he became aware of such thing, Itachi also knew that Danzō saying them mixed with sarcasm. Itachi was making an experience

many times stronger than the ones that ordinary eleven-year-old children experience. He understood the inner workings of a feeling like that.

«However, the village is unsatisfied for letting that traitor off.»

«I understand.» he said with a slight irritation to Danzō, who was using an excessively indirect speaking style. Then, after he spat out those words, he regretted his own imprudence. Danzō saw both through the fact that Itachi felt anger, and that he had regretted it. After he noticed, he didn't let it out in his attitude at all.

Itachi unpleasantly felt the bottomless darkness of that man that walked in Konoha's dark.

«I used very circuitous words with you, who had guessed right. Excuse me.»

«Well»

«But, it was because I wanted to let you know everything about that man.»

He swallowed his question "why do I really have to know".

«Kill that man.»

«Understood.» he answered immediately.

Even if he had a family, even if he was an excellent shinobi, a traitor was a traitor.

He had a mission.

He had no choice.

«Although it's late, I believe that the Anbu is the place where you should stay.»

Danzō stood up.

«I allow one comrade to accompany you in this mission. The choice is up to you. Take someone who you can confide in as a best friend.»

Turning around the desk placed in front of him, he approached Itachi with a slow pace.

«Things such as peace are really a burden.» Danzō said standing in front of Itachi. Those eyes that looked down on him seized his mature face, without letting it free.

«It's also a thing difficult to produce, but preserving it is the most difficult art of all.»

Danzō was just a little intoxicated with himself.

He had such sensation.

«People eat food. When someone finished his supper of that day, somewhere there are people who suffer because they hadn't eat. When someone gains something, somewhere else someone loses something. Such trivial unbalance little by little changes irregularly day after day of rest.»

The faces of the Uchiha clan that met at the Naka shrine floated in his mind.

Itachi gritted thoroughly his molars inside his closed lips in order not to let him understand the slight shock caused in his mind.

«In this fictitious shadow that is peace there are always suffering people. There are people burdened with the darkness. Don't you think that the beings that devour greedily peace forgetting this are really despicable?»

A stench that gave him nausea invaded his nasal cavity. When he understood that it was Danzō's breath, Itachi patiently endured it.

«If it weren't for the people who sever the open seams that are generated from a peaceful start without showing their emotions at all, this world wouldn't be able to attain peace even for one instant.»

Danzō was saying that in this village, those who worked for it were the Anbu and the Root.

«I've told you before that you have an evil countenance.»

He remembered.

It was the day he graduated from the Academy.

«In your life, war will always follow you around. That's why you have to acquire the strength only to break off your own destiny.»

«Is it the Anbu the place where I'll obtain this strength?»

His face, half concealed by bandages, nodded firmly.

«These are perceptive words, but you are very, no, extremely perceptive. However, this sensitiveness will make you suffer.»

«Make me suffer...»

«Stop trying to hide yourself in front of me.» Danzō said, and his hand touched his shoulders. His hand was so cold it made him shiver.

«The hope of a true peace, of a world without conflicts, will make you suffer.»

«How did you...»

«I know everything about you.»

Danzō opened his eye. Its deep and gloomy darkness was so wide that he was almost drawn into it.

«People who bring true peace are the ones that carry the deepest darkness within themselves in this world. I think that in your case, you'll become such being.»

His wicked lips took the shape of a smile.

«Come by my side, Uchiha Itachi.»

Escaping from the darkness that emitted that strange charm, Itachi's instinct chose to turn his face away before he even thought about it.

*

«Assassination...» Shisui, who had finished listening to Itachi's story, muttered as to confirm to himself.

They were at the cliff that only the two of them knew. Despite they were facing each other, Shisui hadn't met his eyes. With his eyes still looking downward obliquely, he was pondering motionlessly.

«When I was told to bring a person I could entrust my life with, I thought about you.»

«If we're talking about Kohinata Mukai, he's a very good shinobi.» the man who had grown to be a prominent shinobi in Konoha as Shisui the Body-Flicker said, and went back on pondering.

«I have no right to ask you, who have no connection of sort with the Anbu, but since I don't have even one acquaintance of the Anbu, there are no guys that I can entrust with this mission.»

«That because you're not very good at socializing with people, you.» Shisui said, and smiled.

Kohinata Mukai, that was the name of the man Danzō had ordered him to kill. His parentage was a distant relative of the Hyūga clan, but he didn't have the kekkei genkai of the Byakugan because he was from a new family line started a long time before.

«Don't tell me that that man is secretly in contact with Kirigakure...»

«What kind of guy is he?»

«He's a sharp and able person that while he was an Anbu he also completed regular missions as a jōnin. Winning also the Hokage's trust, that time of the daimyō's escort mission he certainly was among the Anbu.»

So it meant that he was also there when he had been attacked by the masked man. Itachi knew that that time they had fallen under the masked man's genjutsu, except for the Anbu named Hatake Kakashi.

Among them there was also Mukai.

«Don't you know that this man is weak against genjutsu?»

«That's because it's not that one goes around telling things about the weak points of the comrades of the village.»

Obviously. Itachi regretted his stupid question.

«But I know about his strong point.»

Shisui raised his face and looked at Itachi. A turbulent shadow flickered in the light that dwelled in his friend's eyes. The fact that it was a proof of his determination was immediately clear to Itachi, who understood his long-time friend.

«Mukai's strong point is taijutsu.»

For some reason he felt he knew.

If he followed Mukai's blood, he'd arrive at the Hyūga clan.

Speaking of the Hyūga clan, it was a prominent family among the Village of the Hidden Leaf.

If he traced back to the origin he'd arrive to the Sage of Six Paths, that was the founder of the shinobi, and the Byakugan, which was a kekkei genkai, was an ocular technique that was at the same level of the Uchiha's Sharingan. It could confirm by sight the channels (that is, the pathways) of the chakra, and block the chakra by suppressing the pathways of an enemy. Its field of vision was said to be in every direction as well as without blind spots.

When they suppressed the pathways, the Hyūga clan utilized taijutsu.

This taijutsu, which was called Gentle Fist, was a technique that made one's own chakra flow and the chakra that was in all the things align, unleashed a continuous attack with a circular body movement, and destroyed the inside of the opponents' body, their internal organs etcetera. The Gentle First was the Hyūga clan's Secret Technique, but if the Kohinata family was a branch family line, it wasn't strange that it had been transmitted at least partially to them, too.

«A Gentle Fist user?»

Shisui answered, nodding at Itachi's question.

«It'll be advantageous for us as long as we don't get near him.»

«Mukai is quite skilled. It's not likely that he'll allow us a long-range fight.»

Apparently a virtual battle with Mukai was already going on inside Shisui's head.

«You'll come with me?»

«Obviously.»

His friend's fist hit Itachi's chest.

«There're no other guys you trust except me, right?»

«Uh huh...»

«If you enter the Anbu, you'll get closer to the heart of the village. In that case, you'll become an irreplaceable existence for the clan.»

Itachi wondered what did those words meant.

Shisui and Itachi shared the same will.

Their will was that as long as it was for the clan's peace, it didn't matter if they sacrificed their lives.

In the meetings that were secretly held every month at the Naka Shrine, the atmosphere was steadily becoming unbearable each meeting. The resentment against the village was already at its limits, Itachi and Shisui knew that.

They had to avoid at any cost at least the accidental discharges.

That was a shared knowledge.

An insurrection of the clan would mean dragging the village into a war.

The previous Great War and the Nine-Tail's attack.

Having overcome two dangers, the village was a place that had finally begun building peace.

If the Uchiha clan caused an incident here, the village would be enveloped by sorrow and death again.

Only one Anbu was from the Uchiha clan...

As Shisui said, Itachi would surely become an irreplaceable existence for the clan.

«The fact that you'll join the Anbu is a dream for me, too.»

«A dream?»

«The Uchiha and the village would become brethren in its true meaning. I thought that we needed a shinobi of the clan who'd have a deep connection with the heart of the village for this. You'll be an existence that will frankly convey the clan's affliction and hopes. If you join the Anbu, you'll be able to carry out this duty. You, who wish for the clan's peace more than anyone else, will surely be successful.»

Itachi gasped a little. In seeing this, Shisui's face became suddenly cheerful.

«I'm a jōnin that belongs to the village, you a member of the Anbu, we both don't belong to the Military Police Force. We can keep an eye on the clan from an objective point of view.»

«My father and our other clansmen have secluded themselves in their own shell, and they can't see the outside world.»

«Itachi...»

Shisui called his friend's name as if he was spitting out his agony from inside his chest.

«The people of the clan have confined themselves in a small world, and they don't even try to see the outside world. The fact that their own destiny doesn't open up will increase their grudge, and they'll say that it's the village's fault. By simply saying that it's the village's fault, Hokage-sama's fault, the Senju clan's fault, they don't even try to take advantage of the situation. But...»

He opened his closed eyelids, and stared at Itachi.

«You're different.»

At Shisui's words, he gulped.

«You always cut through your destiny with your own strength. You graduated from the Academy in one year, you passed through the Chūnin Exam alone, and now you're trying to enter the Anbu. You don't resign yourself to your destiny because of the clan.»

Was it really so?

Itachi didn't understand it well.

He felt that he was only intently running through the path he had to follow. And only because of that his feelings hadn't changed.

«You could become even Hokage...»

Shisui smiled.

«As the first Uchiha Hokage, you'll become an existence that will break off the destiny between the clan and the village from its root, I believe it.»

Itachi's heart throbbed fast.

The dream of becoming Hokage...

It was a dream he hadn't talked about with anybody. It was a dream he hadn't talked about even with Shisui, who was his one and only friend. He hadn't said it to anyone because he was afraid that it would disappear altogether if he mentioned it.

This dream had become words from Shisui's mouth and had reached his own ears.

Surprise and delight immediately overwhelmed Itachi's chest.

«I'll be your friend forever.»

«Shisui...»

«I can't wait to see how far you'll grow up from now on.»

Itachi frantically kept back that welling up heat coming from inside his chest. He had never experienced a thing like crying in front of others, not even once in his life so far. He thought that shinobi should never disclose their own feeling.

Well...

He had cried in front of people just once.

He was four that time.

It was when he had been to the battlefield in which a war had just finished, being brought along by his father. While the pouring rain fell down, when he looked at the mountain of abandoned corpses, he couldn't hold back his tears. Even now he remembered that he was frantically suppressing his shivering in order to not let his father sense it.

Itachi hadn't changed from that time.

He had to avoid a war, no matter what.

Things like wars shouldn't happen twice.

Itachi had taken this resolve in his mind that time, when he was a four-year-old boy crying as he was hit by the rain.

For this reason he was an Anbu.

For this reason he'll be Hokage.

«You'll do it, Itachi.»

At his friend's hopeful voice, Itachi nodded with all his strength, putting a feeling of gratitude into it.

5

Inside the deadly silent wood, his heart pounded as if it was dancing.

As he felt his now grown-up brother's lively presence on the skin, Itachi hid in the shadow of a large tree and smiled alone.

Hide and seek...

For Itachi it was just a game, but for Sasuke it was a serious deal.

«Where did you go, big brother?»

Itachi looked with a pleasant feeling at his brother's figure, who had muttered this without persuading anyone. Even if he thought that it was immature, he had completely erased his presence and his chakra using a shinobi technique at his best. It shouldn't be possible for a child that had just turned six to find him, no matter how.

Without even losing time in taking off his shoes, when his mission ended he had been taken out to the grove of the shrine that surrounded the Naka Shrine.

It had been decided that his younger brother would enter the Academy few days later. Sasuke wanted to build up his strength as a shinobi before attending the school, and was all worked up.

His younger brother, so hopeful, couldn't help but be cute.

He thought about Sasuke so much that it even surprised himself.

Itachi had been different from the other children since he was a child. Speaking of when he was four-five years old, when Sasuke was born, he was old enough to want to behave like a spoiled child with his father and his mother. But from that time Itachi was aware of the path he should walk on. He'd become a skilled shinobi to build a world without conflicts. He had thought about what were the things he needed for this, and put them into practice. That's why even when his brother was born, he didn't feel like taking his father and mother's time at all.

He was only happy that there was an existence that could share his same blood. And this thought steadily became bigger as Sasuke grew up.

When he looked at his younger brother, who openly loved him dearly and relied on him, he thought that he shouldn't live in a way that didn't match Sasuke's hopes. He thought that he wouldn't delude Sasuke. This thought became the strength that made Itachi himself go on. Sasuke gave him the motivation that he would never be able to have alone. He couldn't help but feel grateful to his younger brother.

«Big brother!» Sasuke yelled with a voice that expressed his irritation. Since he couldn't find him, he was starting to get angry.

«I guess I have no choice...» Itachi muttered in a conversational tone, which didn't arrive to Sasuke, and unleashed his chakra just a bit.

«!»

Sasuke, who was looking around in every direction, tensed, and made his body shake just once.

He had felt the presence of his older brother.

The smile that was on Itachi's lips became even more distinct.

It was a minimal vibration of chakra that he would never have been able to sense if he had been an ordinary child.

But Sasuke had clearly perceived it.

He was undoubtedly talented as a shinobi.

«Here, Sasuke.» he muttered, still in a conversational tone.

A sound of footsteps went straight towards him. As it came closer, it became a hopping way of walking. His brother's small feet proceeded as he trod on the dry leaves. Despite this, his feet made no sound at all.

He had already learned the technique of erasing the sound of his footsteps.

In this case, even if he entered the Academy immediately he's probably wouldn't lose to the students of the upper classes.

«Found you!» Sasuke said while pointing at the crouched Itachi. His younger brother's eyes, who was looking down on his older brother, were sparkling fiercely with dreams or hopes.

«Too bad...»

As he said this, Itachi disappeared in a puff of smoke.

A Shadow Clone.

The real Itachi was above Sasuke's head.

«Aah! That's unfair, big brother!»

His brother, who had raised a pure yell, suddenly raised his head.

«Ah...»

Sasuke found the figure of his older brother looking down on him as he sat on a thick branch.

«Eheh...»

Looking at Sasuke's flustered face, who was looking above his head so much that he wondered if his neck wouldn't break, he burst into laughter instinctively. Itachi rarely let his emotion show in front of others, but he was spontaneously able to convey his own feelings to his younger brother. It was strange.

«Big brother...»

With the energetic voice if before completely disappeared, Sasuke muttered in a daze.

«You found me?»

Still smiling, Itachi jumped off the branch with a simple movement, and stood in front of his brother, who had opened his mouth.

He had to find his older brother with his own determination, but it turned out the unwilling outcome that he achieved his purpose accidentally, and it made Sasuke be in a state of surprise that went beyond frustration.

«T-things like Shadow Clones are unfair!»

Sasuke, who had somehow returned back to his senses, pestered him while making a sour face. As he smiled with his whole face, Itachi looked down on his younger brother.

He earnestly thought that he had grown a lot.

His stature, which reached only Itachi's lap just some time ago, now surmounted his waist with his whole head.

«You sensed my chakra very well.»

«I'll enter the Academy very soon. It's natural that I can do things like that.»

Sasuke wasn't aware that the chakra that he had sensed was so minimal that an ordinary six-year-old boy wouldn't have been able to feel.

«Really, is it natural?»

«Yeah.»

He didn't go as far as praising him.

Because it wasn't a bad thing the fact that he thought it was natural to be able to do it.

People became careless when they thought that they were special. If he thought that it was natural that he was able to do those things, it meant that he knew his own insufficiency. Since there was something he lacked, he wouldn't show his concern in the things he was already able to do. That's why he didn't think it was special. People who thought so were those who kept walking always in front of them.

He didn't want to stop Sasuke's uncompromising progresses by praising him.

Suddenly he remembered Shisui's words.

“You don't resign yourself to your destiny because of the clan.”

He didn't want Sasuke to resign himself to his destiny. He didn't want him to become a person that refuses to break off his destiny, being sized by the clan's ties and dark feelings.

In Sasuke's case, it'll surely be all right. Sasuke had an innocence that he himself didn't have. He didn't have even the evil countenance Danzō told him about.

Sasuke would surely surpass him, Itachi was sure of it.

In his younger brother's case, it didn't matter even if he could surpass him. He didn't show it on his face, but Itachi hated to lose more than the others. If it hadn't been for it, he wouldn't have become a shinobi who's admission in the Anbu at eleven was discussed.

Then Itachi thought that his younger brother could even lose.

Even he couldn't understand the essence of this feeling. He didn't understand why he thought in such way. However, there was no doubt that he wished so from his true feelings.

«Let's go back home.»

«Eeh, hide just another time.»

When Itachi beckoned him, Sasuke took a step forward.

«Forgive me, Sasuke.»

He poked his forehead with his fingertips.

«*Ouch*»

This exchange of beckoning and poking the forehead was a course of event that had happened a lot of times so far. But every time Sasuke obediently went near him and received his fingers on his forehead. The obedient figure of his younger brother made his heart feel calm.

By his reaction of when he had his forehead hit, he caught a glimpse of Sasuke's growth. He did it for the very first time when he was three. He was being insistently pestered by Sasuke, who could say nothing but baby babblings like "High, high!", he made him stop somehow poking his forehead. That time, Sasuke had hold his forehead, and cried with a *waah-waah*. Itachi didn't even intend on putting so much strength into it, but his three-year-old younger brother was terribly hurt.

Now he endured it only frowning a little. Speaking of ordinary, it was natural, but Itachi felt Sasuke's growth, who was hopefully getting used to the provocations of the outside world by doing so.

«Let's go back home, Sasuke.»

In the setting sun, their two shadows were one next to the other.

The shadow cast by Sasuke never left Itachi, following his big back.

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He jumped as soon as he put his feet on the branch. Then he moved towards the next tree he made sure of. Then he repeated it again.

It was a flight.

There were three shinobi surrounding Itachi. They were all comrades coming together for the first time.

Itachi knew one of them.

Kohinata Mukai.

He was the target of the order of assassination Danzō assigned him.

It had happened that one of the team composed by jōnin and chūnin that Mukai led had injured himself all of a sudden during his day off and had left a void open. Then Itachi had hurriedly been included as a supporter.

Itachi saw Danzō's presence behind that course of events, that is the chūnin's injury in his day off and his own selection. He couldn't help but think that he had used a person in his hands, injured the chūnin and intentionally inserted Itachi. If it hadn't been for that, it was unlikely that there could have been a sudden vacant position in the team in which

there was the target of his assassination, and that he himself had joined them. He was sure that is was Danzō's wordless message to tell him to perform a mission with him, and observe Mukai's skills in advance, even if a little.

«It's my fault. I'm sorry.» the chūnin immediately near Itachi told towards Mukai's back, who was jumping in front of his eyes.

«No worries.» Mukai answered simply, and kept jumping lightly from tree to tree.

If they proceeded a little bit longer they would come out in a plain.

If they went even further the border of the country would spread in front of their eyes.

Probably also the number of their pursuers would decrease noticeably. Now their top priority was to arrive there, rather than wasting their breath chattering.

Mukai's reaction was right.

That should have been a simple infiltration mission.

The Great War had ended, and each village maintained amicable relationships. But sometimes they caused excessive exchanges, and it also became that they produced an atmosphere of turbulence.

Konoha had caught hold of the information that the Village of the Hidden Sand and the Village of the Hidden Mist had secretly tried to conclude a pact with military purposes. In the event that they begun a war with the other villages, the Sand and the Mist would become surely allies, no matter the reason. In time of peace, they'd do a similar thing with a cooperation to decide congruently a potential enemy and for the capitulation of a targeted village.

That secret agreement was a premise of war.

The current peace was being maintained somehow or other with each shinobi village that was in the Five Great Countries mutually restraining each other. If these two nations secretly joined their hands, and began mobilizing deciding an enemy congruently, in a moment the peace would collapse and the daily war would be restored. They absolutely had to prevent this secret agreement to avoid such situation.

The Village of the Hidden Leaf, which obtained the information that a delegate of Kirigakure was visiting the Village of the Hidden Sand, had ordered Mukai and the other to spy on the meeting. To investigate the contents of the secret agreement with great care, and report them. Only that was the mission. As long as they weren't sensed by the enemy, the mission wouldn't be difficult at all.

It was supposed to...

Itachi and the others, who had sneaked into the Fourth Kazekage's residence, had watched over the meeting from the shadows.

The meeting had ended with the contents such as comparing and adjusting the situation between the Sand and the Mist, and Itachi and the others tried to escape from the Village of the Hidden Sand. However, at that point an unexpected situation occurred.

A chūnin comrade was caught in a trespasser trap.

For this reason, the four of them ran without looking aside.

And now they were trying to escape from their pursuers somehow.

«We'll arrive to the country border very soon.»

Nobody answered Mukai's voice.

«If they came to know that Konoha became aware of their secret agreement, both the countries wouldn't be able to move carelessly. The fact that we've been noticed was a good thing in itself.»

Mukai was talking towards the chūnin who was worrying since he fell in the trap.
Itachi's visual opened in front of him.

They had gone out in the plain.

The four of them landed together.

If they ran immediately till the country border, they should make it somehow...

«!»

Itachi stopped his feet, and turned around.

Mukai stopped. Staring at the wood they had just left, he put a hand on his pouch, fetched one cigarette and lit the tip.

«What are you doing!» Itachi said behind Mukai. Also the other two were bewildered by their captain's sudden actions.

Ignoring their voices, he fetched a silver bottle from the back pocket of his trousers, and held it to his mouth. A sweet scent, carried by the wind, informed them that the thing that Mukai had brought to his mouth was sake.

«Captain!»

«C'mon, look.» Mukai said without even looking back towards Itachi, and made his cigarette puff. The wind, which was blowing fiercely, carried the purple smoke away. Also the Village of the Hidden Sand, whose surface is mostly covered by the desert, has a lot of green once you get near its border. The grass was brushing gently Mukai's feet, who was firmly stepping on the ground.

«At any rate, we're exposed. If it's so they probably ain't send us back home uninjured. Besides...»

He looked at Itachi over his shoulder.

«You're that famous Uchiha Itachi. I wanna show you my skills too, y'know?»

At these words, the two, who have been bewildered until some time ago, expressed a smile.

«They came.»

As Mukai said this, several silhouettes jumped out of the wood.

They were more than twenty.

The pursuers had already spotted Itachi and the others, and surrounded them.

«You guys, don't interfere.»

Mukai put the cigarette in the portable ashtray, turning it off, and gulped down the sake.

«You've decided to give up?» one of the pursuers said. The symbol of Sunagakure was carved on his forehead protector.

«Come now...»

He drank sake once again. At this overly arrogant attitude, the pursuers stood on alert.

A flash sparkled.

Before Mukai's eyes, who was shading his face with his left hand, a sharp noise resounded.

«Aaah, you spoiled my precious sake!»

A kunai pierced the bottle of sake that Mukai had tossed.

«You've got guts to drink things like sake at a time like this so recklessly.»

«I've gotta weakness for alcohol and cigarettes. I decided to relieve my tension this way before a battle.»

«Looks like you have no intention on being caught quietly.»

«'course.»

All the pursuers swooped down on Mukai at once.

Some shinobi went also towards Itachi and the others, who were watching. His two chūnin comrades took both Itachi's shoulders, who had instinctively prepared, under their arms, and jumped.

«What are you doing!»

«You'll only be a hindrance for the captain.»

As the older chūnin said this, they leapt over the pursuers' heads and escaped from the encirclement.

Mukai noticed that the pursuers had jumped to follow them.

«I am your opponent!»

Mukai's kick, who was running with a terrific speed, exploded in the stomach of a pursuer who had jumped towards Itachi and the others.

Without a scream, the pursuer was thrown onto the ground and lost his senses.

Mukai landed.

«Shall I begin?»

Mukai's chakra swelled up suddenly.

The pupil of his left eye disappeared, and veins ran from his eyelids in the form of concentric circles.

The Byakugan.

It was a kekkei genkai passed down only in the Hyūga clan.

Shisui had told him that it was unlikely that a person from the Kohinata, which had separated from the Hyūga so many time before, would hold the Byakugan, but now this unbelievable thing was happening in front of his eyes.

«Normally I don't show it, but this's an exception.» Mukai said to the pursuers, and his eye seized Itachi just for a moment.

«Kooooo...»

Amassing chakra at the base of his stomach, Mukai inhaled deeply. He assumed a stance with one leg bent in front and the other extended behind, slightly lowering his waist, his left hand stuck out and his right hand stayed near his chest. Without clutching his fist, he used his hand as a sword.

«Crush this guy now!» a man that looked like the leader of the pursuers said.

Twenty people attacked him at once.

Kunai flew wildly about.

A rain of blades without openings to escape.

Mukai laughed.

He jumped towards the deadly rain that was falling on him.

«Sha!»

An agile roundhouse kick.

He precisely caught the side of the kunai in front of his eyes. The kunai, which had been repelled, clashed with another kunai and changed its trajectory. This succession spread, and a lot of kunai changed their trajectory.

Still with the rotation of the kick, he delivered a backfist turning around.

Even this hit the side of a new kunai.

Mukai's body began his fall.

A front kick this time.

He repelled the point of the blade with his tiptoes.

He revolved forward.

His heel let a forth kunai fall.

He landed.

The rain of kunai penetrated the earth.

Mukai was all right.

Countless jet black kunai were stuck among the grass. However, only the soil under Mukai's feet wasn't completely polluted. Amazingly, Mukai had protected his body from the deadly rain by repelling only four kunai.

Itachi thought outside the circle if he could really do that trick just like him.

He could...

But could he do it with thinking that he could because he saw Mukai's movements, or could he really do it with his instinct alone?

«Kill him, kill him» the enemy yelled, revealing his impatience.

Huge shuriken, blades, cudgels with claws... Having as many specialised weapons as they liked, the pursuers drew near Mukai.

Then Itachi clearly saw the flow of the events.

Mukai dodged the enemy's attacks, full of killing intent, as if he was dancing. Then he unleashed an attack, and defeated them with one blow hitting accurately the enemy's vitals, who had become defenceless.

It was absolutely perfect.

When he hit twenty blows, only the leader was left.

«You're the only one left.»

The enemy, holding a long sword with both his hands, was shaking.

«Whatcha gonna do? Still up for more? It's impossible for you alone to go back home uninjured.» Mukai said, fetched a cigarette from his breast pocket, and lit it.

«Kieeeeeee!»

While emitting a strange voice, unclear if it was a shriek or a yell, the leader closed the distance between them.

The first stroke was an overhead slash of the highest level.

Mukai avoided it slightly turning his body away on the right. He aimed there and shoot a mowing-down slash.

For an instant, Mukai's left eye appeared to Itachi emitting a white glint.

«H-how...»

«I dunno.» Mukai told the enemy, who was muttering dumbfounded, still holding his cigarette in his mouth. His left hand was slightly hanging forward, and the sword had completely settled on the space between his thumb and his forefinger. Maybe because it didn't bulge whether he pulled or pushed, a vein pulsed on the leader's face.

«I won't kill you with one blow.» Mukai muttered, and left the sword. The man, who was suddenly released from his restraint, broke his stance.

Mukai took a step forward with his right leg, his cigarette still in his mouth. His forehead almost hit the man's solar plexus.

«Eight Trigrams, Two Palms...»

Mukai's palm hit the man's stomach twice in succession.

«Eight Trigrams, Four Palms»

Now four blows.

The man opened his eyes wide.

«Eight Trigrams, Eight Palms»

A blood spurt came out of his mouth.

«Eight Trigrams, Sixteen Palms.»

Mukai's palm stroke him from his face to his feet sixteen times simultaneously.

In the man's eyes, who had revolved lightly in midair just like a dry leaf blown away by a strong wind, suddenly the light of consciousness disappeared.

More than twenty shinobi of Sunagakure were lying around Mukai, who pushed his cigarette into the ashtray.

Mukai's left eye, who was calmly walking towards Itachi, emitted a glint again.

«I'm a guy who's genes skipped some generations. Even if the main family separated from the branch family in theory, the blood in itself ain't divided. As long as you have an element, it'll show up in this way. Don't tell the others.» he said, and put his palm on Itachi's head.

He brushed him away, shaking his head.

Maybe because he thought that Itachi had got angry for having been treated like a child, Mukai smiled a little bit apologetically, and went by his comrades' side.

«If we don't go home quickly, my kids'll be waitin' for me.»

«How are your children?»

Mukai shrugged at the question.

«These days, they ain't feelin' very well. I'm a li'l bit worried. Let's go home fast without reporting to the Hokage-sama»

«Is that so...»

The conversation between Mukai and the others didn't arrive to Itachi's ears. I had not even a little bit of anger for having been treated like a child. He had no time to waste in thinking about such trivial thing.

Only he and Shisui killing that man...

It seemed it had become a difficult mission.

«C'mon, let's go Itachi.»

Apparently, the smile that had appeared on Mukai's lips, who had looked back, wasn't feeling at all the deadly presence that was creeping towards him.

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The unusually gloomy atmosphere was ruling the inner sanctuary. Without being able to stand that seriousness, Itachi inhaled deeply.

«There's a thing I want everyone to hear today.» his father, who was standing with his back to the shrine in which theshintai was worshipped, said seriously. Itachi saw an ominous shadow at the corners of his mouth, which was more depressed than usual.

«Itachi's entrance in the Anbu is imminent.»

He spoke as if his fellow clansmen had already completely agreed.

Mukai's assassination...

It wasn't a mission that he could achieve so simply.

Most likely it would turn out to be a mortal combat in which he'd risk his life.

Maybe luck would be at his side and he'd have three out of ten chance of dying.

«A member of the Uchiha entering the Anbu... This means that a chance is coming for us more than ever.»

«Well then, Captain.» Tekka, who was his father's trusted friend, said lowering his voice. Everyone gulped.

The turbulent presence was getting steadily stronger.
Itachi heard a sound of his own heartbeat pounding violently inside his eardrums.
He unconsciously looked for Shisui.
In the third row in which his brethren were sitting, there was his friend's figure. Staring at his father, his strained mental tension was tightly transmitted from his immobile back.
Stop, father...
Itachi yelled inside his mind.
Silent.
As if the clan's hatred had penetrated inside his mouth and coagulated, he held his throat.
«We have served the village on countless occasions so far. But what did they do for us?»
Nobody answered. They were silently leaning their ears in order not to miss even one of the words that his father uttered.
«The discrimination towards us is in their roots.»
His father's words tightened his chest mercilessly.
The thing that Itachi hated the most was almost taking shape in front of his eyes.
Hatred.
Conflicts.
War.
Regardless of how you use those words, their true nature is just one.
Meaningless death of a lot of people.
«We have always endured. But this is the last straw.»
With his vision slowly swinging from left to right, Itachi noticed that he was shaking his head. Even before his thoughts, his body was denying his father.
Nobody was looking at Itachi's figure.
Their eyes were concentrating on his father, sat in the chief seat.
Don't.
Stop, father.
Please stop...
The voice of his heart didn't reach his father.
Instinctively, his father's eyes became red.
The Sharingan.
The agitation of his father's heart made his eyes transform.
«With Itachi's entrance in the Anbu, we'll move onto the next stage of the execution of our coup d'état against the village.»
«Ooh...» everyone exclaimed at once.
There wasn't confusion anywhere.
What was hanging on the voices of all the people present was an echo of joy.
«Itachi.»
Pushing his way through the shouts of joy, his father called his son's name.
Itachi heard that his own name was called as if it hadn't been a concern of his.
Seeing that his son didn't answer, Fugaku continued.
«The true purpose of letting you join the Anbu is to investigate the village's internal condition with great care and report back to us.»
Spy...
Itachi remembered Kohinata Mukai.

The act of revealing one party's internal condition to another party between two forces that were in the axis of a conflict, even though he was inside his own village, was nothing but spying.

“Will I become like Mukai?” Itachi asked himself.

There's no way he'd receive an answer.

«The information you'll bring back will hold the clan's destiny.»

All the eyes of the clan turned towards Itachi at once.

Countless red eyes...

Despite the fact that he shouldn't have been under a genjutsu, Itachi felt dizzy.

Where in the world was he going to?

One crow was flying aiming at the sky.

An ominous jet-black arm was coiling around his leg.

The darkness was trying to tie him to the earth.

No matter how much he tried to struggle, the clinging arm kept pulling him forcefully.

The sky was drifting from him.

A bloody tear escaped from the crow's eye...

«The day of action is near.»

At Fugaku's declaring voice, everyone stood up.

Itachi kept staying seated.

As if he had lost his way in the depths of a wood, the legs of his brethren who had stood up seemed a forest dyed with darkness. Among the trees that covered Itachi's field of vision, he spotted the figure of another man who had kept staying seated.

«Shisui...»

The eyes of his friend, who had turned around, seized Itachi.

They had a desolate look, more than the eyes of any other person he'd seen so far.

His friend smiled sadly.

«Our conflict will surely lead the Uchiha towards glory.»

Itachi heard his father's voice, who made everyone delighted, with a sombre sensation.

The Itachi of this time didn't know the true shape of darkness that visited him yet.

The darkness was quiet, and patiently waited for him.

Until the day will come that will embrace him in its dark chest...